

THE STONES AWAKE



CARLETON
BEALS

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THE STONES
AWAKE



BY CARLETON BEALS

THE STONES AWAKE

THE STORY OF HUEY P. LONG

FIRE ON THE ANDES

BLACK RIVER

THE CRIME OF CUBA

PORFIRIO DIAZ
DICTATOR OF MEXICO

BANANA GOLD

MEXICAN MAZE

DESTROYING VICTOR

BRIMSTONE AND CHILI

ROME OR DEATH
THE STORY OF FASCISM

MEXICO
AN INTERPRETATION



THE STONES AWAKE

A NOVEL OF
MEXICO

By
CARLETON BEALS

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AMERICA

FIRST EDITION

All the characters in this novel are entirely fictitious

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PART I



MAGDALENA

MAGDALENA

GRANDMOTHER and Esperanza, seated on two stone flaggings at the sagging door of the hut, were weaving straw mats. The old woman's wrinkled brown fingers moved stiffly but expertly.

She had woven straw mats all her life. Formerly she could weave half a dozen a day; now—since a cataract had grown over one eye and her bony fingers were more tremulous—only one. But even the four cents profit could not be scorned these hard times.

She peered at her work, her reddish eyelids puffy as those of a horny lizard. Her head ached a good deal, so she had pasted green medicinal leaves on her temples and had drawn her blue *rebozo* tightly about her loose nut-brown cheeks by running the ends crosswise over her flat bosom and under her skinny armpits.

The two women did not speak often. The girl—shapely seventeen—was barefoot. She wore only a simple black slip that made her olive skin seem lighter; and her soft coal-black hair, evenly parted, was drawn back severely from her temples. Her only adornments were long bright red pendants and an aluminum Virgin, suspended about her neck by a red cord. Occasionally she touched the image and smiled sweetly, her big black eyes gentle but lively with youth.

She looked up from her work at the two lofty snow peaks, Ixtaccihuatl, the Woman in White, and Popocatepetl, the Smoke Mountain, faintly blue and rose in the late afternoon light. The crest of the first, above great forests of pine, was a vast sweep of snow and ice, with the unmistakable outlines of the head, breasts and feet of a white-draped sleeping woman; the second rose sheer and swift, a perfect cone. A long wisp of white cloud hung utterly motionless near its summit. The two god-like volcanoes filled Esperanza's heart with grandeur and tranquillity.

Fifty yards away, her grandfather, Pepe Huitrón, was making a large cross out of fresh cornstalks, leaves, daisies and orange

zempaxuchitl flowers, intertwining them with his knobby old fingers. It was for tomorrow's fiesta.

A typical peon, dressed in white pajamas and *guaraches*, leather-thonged sandals, he had, in spite of his age and humble attire, a jaunty air. His straw sombrero, rakishly tilted, gave his wrinkled face, with its sharp bony chin, a likable leer. He was a sparse but big-jointed old man, gnarled, like a venerable leaf-stripped quince tree.

Near him squatted Bobo, the village dwarf, a canny yet somehow stupid expression on his big entranced face. Now and then he made guttural sounds of approval at Pepe's progress with the cross.

Grandmother wove and wove and occasionally sighed. She was worried about her grandson, José—Esperanza's brother—whose rebellious nature of late was always getting him into serious trouble at his work. It was foolish for the serf-born to be obstinate and sullen; they were punished by floggings or were shipped off post-haste to the army; sometimes even killed. Peons, who were obedient and respectful, got along best. She and Pepe and Esperanza might all get thrown off the plantation if José kept on. But he wouldn't listen. He was always boiling inside.

Rey, Esperanza's collie mongrel, pattered out of the hut with cocked ears, sniffing. He was as thin as a pulled out accordion. Esperanza spoke to him. His tail thumped.

She breathed deeply. The air was pungent with burning brush and cowdung. A burro brayed in cracked agony.

And so, the two women sat silent, fingers busy at a task such as their forebears had known centuries upon centuries before the white sails of Conqueror Cortés had hove across the sea, a labor as necessary to them still as though the monsters of steam and machinery had never invaded the earth.

Here, on the Hacienda Magdalena, Esperanza had grown up in the little serf village of Milpa Verde. She knew every path, every stone, every tree, every maguey and cactus plant—they were part and parcel of her being.

And this humble one-room hut was her home. Its thatched roof was surmounted by a small wooden cross with a tuft of good-health herbs behind it. The one door, of cleated rough boards, swung on leather hinges. A long lane curved up through the village between gray stone walls and rows of organ cactus, over which clambered chayote and morning-glory vines.

Esperanza stopped weaving to watch the pecking chickens. One found a locust and flew off with a fuss of feathers. The other two chickens pursued her and made a dive at the insect each time she stopped to shake and devour it. Whereupon she would run a bit further. It was nice to watch animals and things.

Esperanza smiled happily. The world seemed so beautiful. There was much hard work, grinding corn on the stone *metate*—a back breaking task—the weaving of mats, washing, mending; but affection for her grandparents, for her dog Rey, for all things about her, warmed her heart constantly. And now she was in love; soon her sweetheart, Luis Cardona, a foreman on the hacienda, would come.

With a half-tilt of her head, she finally held off her work. "*Madre Santísima!* I can hardly wait until tomorrow's fiesta!"

Grandmother shook her gray head and sighed. "Ay! When you are as old as I you won't be wanting fiestas—not the disgraceful kind we have these days."

Esperanza smiled. "You'll be dancing with the rest, Granny."

"With these pains of mine?" The old woman shifted her legs and groaned. "In former time we had real fiestas with religious processions."

"Father Mateo will be here, Granny."

The old woman was querulous. "But it's different now—drink and dance, those shameful new dances, and the men shoot each other and spoil the girls. The men are no good any more."

"My Luis is," retorted Esperanza staunchly. "And he loves me."

Grandmother nodded. "Yes, he's a good boy. Young to be a foreman." She patted her work affectionately and took out a corn-husk cigarette—the gnats were becoming bad.

Esperanza brought a live coal from the brazier inside the hut to light it for her.

Grandmother puffed out the smoke with satisfaction through her toothless mouth. Motionless, like some brown-stone idol, her shawl-hooded figure seemed to epitomize the silent centuries of a subjugated race that long ago had forgotten the meaning of glory or hope, which had merely taken root, like the trees, growing strongly but bowing stolidly, without a murmur, to any and all of life's catastrophes.

Esperanza suddenly hugged herself in ecstasy. "And he can ride! How he can ride! And play the guitar!"

Grandmother spoke like a solemn oracle. "He's good. But be

careful." Her moodiness deepened the lines about her mouth. "I heard the hoot-owl over the roof last night, hooting, hooting. This may be my last fiesta." She shook her head dismally.

"That's a silly idea, Granny. You're terribly gloomy."

Grandmother rocked to and fro. "But why does the owl cry and cry? They say it is the spirit of Malinche, the crying one, whom Cortés betrayed. I learned that on my father's knee, and he from his father before him. And always when the owl cried, someone died that year. You young people believe nothing these days. Why does the owl cry if someone isn't going to die?"

Esperanza's fingers swiftly interlaced the reeds. "Because it can't laugh, Granny."

Esperanza took omens seriously enough, but she was in such good humor, she could not refrain from this saucy reply. She bowed her pretty head lest she might also laugh.

"When one is young, death seems far away," retorted grandmother.

Esperanza tossed her head. "First there is life."

She took up a heavy stone and pounded the edge of her half-completed mat, then with a sharp knife deftly sliced off the loose diagonal ends at the finished border.

With a sigh of relief, she stretched her cramped feet. More to herself than to her grandmother, she murmured, "And Luis can read. He knows what marks on paper say. He's been to school. He is very wise."

Grandmother was also muttering. "My last fiesta, or José's—or Pepe's." She mumbled bitterly about the companion of her years. "If he keeps on going to that saloon, drinking at his age, a grandfather, a gray-haired grandfather, getting drunk every night, spending every cent. We weave and weave, and he merely spends it on drink."

She did not mean to criticize thus, even to herself. Each person was his own law, the law of his shadow-spirit. He could not escape his shadow-spirit. He had to obey. One merely accepted the shortcomings of others, as those of oneself—resignedly. Women, anyway, should be humble and obedient. But she was irritable today from worrying about what might happen to José.

Esperanza kept on talking to herself. "And Luis can fight with a knife. How he can fight!"

Grandmother sniffed indignantly. "Pepe fight? He couldn't

fight a sick calf any more. He just drinks. Though in his day—"Some proud memory glowed in her sallow cheeks.

Esperanza was not listening. "And he can shoot. He can hit a silver peso in the air at fifty feet."

"Oh," groaned grandmother disgustedly. "You're still talking about Luis"—as though that were really surprising.

Esperanza's eyes were two shining stars. "Granny, Luis promised me a big surprise this afternoon. I hope he'll be here soon."

She walked to the corner of the hut to look across the fields. A chicken squawked out of her path.

"Oh, Granny, the Church is lovely!"

The hut was on the edge of the grange, at the entrance to Milpa Verde. To the rear was the hacienda church with its Ethiopian blue portal and wide stone steps, worn deep with the shuffling of countless sandals during three centuries. The carved wooden door was set in a facade of simple Franciscan lines, with formalized stone carvings of flowers. In the niches stood weather-beaten saints with flat beatific faces. Moss and small aerial plants had taken roots in cracks. To the right of the entrance was a shade *ramada* of branches and leaves and under it a raised wooden platform. The late sunlight fell through breaks in the ramada—motionless metallic shafts.

The ramada had been decorated for the morrow's fiesta with little rectangles of multicolored tissue paper, hanging down in regular rows from the boughs. Probably not even Father Mateo knew that long before the coming of the Spaniards, colored papers had been used this way in ceremonies for pagan Tlaloc, the old Aztec god of rain.

Beyond the church was the Casa Grande, "the Big House," the main dwelling of the hacienda, a neat one story but ample building of gray porous stone. Iron bars protected the deep-set windows. A row of incongruous Greek urns adorned the interwoven brick balustrade around the flat roof.

"Old Gabriel is out in front," she called to grandmother, as she caught sight of a ragged servant nodding on the steps.

An ox-cart lumbered by.

Esperanza almost finished her mat. Disappointed that Luis still did not come, she made repeated trips to the corner of the hut. Unhappily she watched the light die away over Cuatla Valley.

Presently she saw a lone figure far beyond the Big House.

It was not Luis but her brother, José. She called the news to grandmother.

Grandmother was surprised. "What! Back from the fields so early!"

"He must have been let off early on account of the fiesta." Esperanza strained her eyes again in the hope of also seeing Luis.

"José is in trouble," said grandmother, in a tone of such deep fear that Esperanza was instantly alarmed.

II

José Huitrón, a well-built Indian youth, came toward the hut with an insolent slouch. His gray shoddy trousers and the broken one-thong *guaraches* on his feet were caked with mud. His pink calico shirt was stiff with streaks of grayish sweat.

Arms akimbo, he stopped behind Pepe to look at the cross. A broad sneer spread over his moon-like face. His teeth were white and sharp.

"Still at it, Grandad? And you, Bobo?"

The dwarf looked up with a vacant grin, then burst into gales of uncanny laughter. He shambled off, shrieking.

Pepe left the cross and patted José on the shoulder. He called to Esperanza. "Ola! My pigeon! The cross is finished. Isn't it a beauty?"

"It's really lovely." She looked at him fondly.

José growled. "You ought to know better, Grandad, than to monkey around with such tomfoolery."

"José!" pleaded Esperanza.

Pepe shook his gray hairs. "Don't blaspheme, my boy."

"Idiotic!" José snarled. "Toys for slaves . . . slaves . . . nailed to crosses, nailed to hard labor, nailed to debts —"

Pepe interlocked his gnarled fingers. "It's faith that's kept us alive. And without a Master, what would we do?"

José grunted and dropped down sullenly on a boulder.

Esperanza loved him, but was afraid of his dark rebellious moods. Though usually ill-humored, he loved her also. The death of their parents three years before had brought them closer together. Three years older than she—twenty—he now felt a deep protective sentiment toward her and worshipped her sweetness and beauty.

His present posture denoted some dark desperation. Esperanza longed to put her arms about him and ask him what was the

matter, but she had long ago discovered it was much better to let him alone.

Her thoughts jumped back to their parents. Her mother had been a strong, cheerful woman, who loved to dance and sing, always a flower in her hair, always full of girlish playfulness, her white teeth always flashing—perhaps because she had been blessed with only two children instead of the customary baker's dozen. Esperanza's father, a handsome, passionate man, though liked by the girls, had been fond only of his spritely wife. Esperanza remembered their home, poor though it was, as a place that gave off a warm glow. Then the glow had turned to ashes.

Three years ago, her parents had been killed by bandits who had invaded the hacienda.

She had been too young for it to hurt her too much. Presently she fell in love with Luis. Life became desirable again. These days she was living in a happy dream.

But now, the tense figure of her grandmother, her worried expression as she glanced cautiously at José, sitting there so sullenly, again filled Esperanza with alarm.

Grandmother, like Esperanza, knew that it was foolish to talk to José until the right moment.

There was an abrupt stillness in the advancing twilight. The group, silent, listened to the lowing of a distant bell.

Grandmother knew only too well what happened to rebellious spirits. The tragedy and heartache because of the sad fate of several of her own children still branded her with sorrow. One should live humbly and toil—that was God's law. If one didn't, the consequences were usually terrible.

She thought over her own past, of her children and grandchildren. After so much child-bearing, most had vanished. Life was like smoke. She could scarcely remember all their names now . . . Eugenio, the oldest, thin-mouthed fellow, had a little store somewhere up north. He, of all of them, had gotten free. Sara had died of enteritis at the age of two. Big, plodding Pablo, a serf like the rest, had married a good girl and had three children on the neighboring Rosales hacienda. Ernestina and Paz had both died early. Gregory, a fiery boy with stiff black hair, taken off to the army, had been killed in the Tomochic Indian war against his fellows, whose lands were stolen by the generals.

She counted her offspring over on her stiff fingers. Tomás, a saucy type, had aroused a foreman's displeasure and had been

shipped off to a living death in the hot Valle Nacional hell-hole. Big, flat-footed Elena had married a muleteer and lived in Jalapa and had eight children. Grandmother had never seen them . . . David, always so silent, had flared up and killed a rival and was in San Juan de Ullúa prison. Arturo, the gay, handsome one, and his lovely dancing wife, Teresa—parents of Esperanza and José—had been killed by bandits. But even so, now there were thirteen grandchildren. She hoped to live to have great grandchildren.

Pepe aroused her from her reverie. He was twisting his hands and scraping his feet; deep within him, despite his rakish air, was the cringing servility of a man who all his life has bowed to the Master and kissed the hand of the priest.

"Now," he stammered, "I'm off to buy candles for the fiesta, for the cross. It will be pretty, all lit up."

José laughed harshly.

Grandmother pursed her mouth. Under her breath, she said, "Candles! *Ay de mi!* The saloon again!"

Esperanza put her arms around grandfather. "Oh, Grandad, why —"

Pepe, customarily so mild, bristled up. His brittle bones seemed to crack. "You're all against me. I'm just going to buy candles, I tell you, candles, nothing but candles." His white hair bristled like a game cock's crest.

José whetted his knife on the boulder. "You'll go straight to the saloon. Why don't you admit it? Crosses, candles and booze. Bah!"

"Even my own offspring turn against me!" Pepe's chin oozed sorrowfully down into his stringy throat. "If it wasn't for your good old grandmother and me, you'd have starved. Yet you complain."

José's eyes gleamed fire, like an animal's. "Whether one lives or dies, does it matter so much, for people like us?"

Grandmother turned to her husband. "Now, Pepe —"

Pepe struck his bosom. "Never will I go near the saloon today. I swear by Saint Thomas and the Holy Virgin. In the name of Saint John —"

"Go on, name all the saints," sneered José.

Grandmother was about to speak, but Esperanza patted her on the arm. "Haven't you done enough for one day, Granny?"

The petty bickering distressed Esperanza. Being young and in

love with Luis, it was difficult for her to understand the acid that rises in the heart with years of harsh living.

She put her arm around the old woman to help her up. Bent over, one hand on her rheumatic legs, grandmother started into the hut.

On second thought, she turned back to José and determinedly blurted out: "José, what are you doing in from the fields so early?"

"Tomorrow is the fiesta." He thrust his knife angrily into the twisted rope of home-grown maguey fiber which served him for a belt.

She peered at him, frightened. "I thought Don Joaquín gave you extra work as punishment for quarreling with Arnulfo."

José answered morosely. "Don Joaquín's gone to town."

"*Ay de mi!*" exclaimed grandmother. "And if Joaquín sees Pepe drunk again!"

Pepe hustled back, beating his chest. "Didn't I tell you, she-mule, I'm *not* going to get drunk. I'm going to buy candles —"

"Pepe—Granny—" Esperanza was almost in tears.

If only Luis would come! The day was all awry, everyone on edge. Perhaps it was because revolution was abroad in the land. The whole country was unsettled, tense, expectant.

She led Pepe off and kissed him good-bye.

"You're as sweet as the Blessed Virgin herself." He stroked her hair tenderly.

She looked anxiously across the fields, then came back.

Grandmother was worrying lest Don Rufo, the majordomo, see José in from the fields without permission.

"Nobody knows I'm in," said José, hoarsely. "I was working alone, pulling weeds out of that damn, slimy irrigation ditch."

Grandmother shook her head. "A chip off the old block—headstrong."

Hands in his pockets, broad shoulders lifted, José strode to and fro, nervous, high-strung, worried.

"They punish me. What's the use of Esperanza having Luis for a sweetheart. He's a foreman, ain't he?"

"It's not you he's in love with," protested Esperanza.

José laughed bitterly. "My own sweetheart—Carlota. Don Joaquín took her, then threw her to the pigs. Now I'm obliged to take his leavings. God!" He beat his head. "I'm sorry I talked

that way, Esperanza. You're lucky it's Luis. He's decent. He might really marry you."

"You are very cruel." Her bosom heaved.

José threw back his head as though challenging the universe. "Bah! I'm jumping out of this slave hole. They say"—he lowered his voice—"that Pancho Madero is coming down from the north with an army to free the peons. I'll join Madero."

"Be careful!" jittered grandmother. "It's dangerous to mention that name. You can't leave us. Pepe can't work any more. We'd all be thrown off the place."

"I don't blame you, José," broke in Esperanza fiercely. "If I were a man I'd go with you. I'd fight. We'll get along."

José stared at her, awed, surprised. "You're fine, Esperanza. You understand. I really am clearing out. I'm going off to join Madero."

A noise beyond the cactus fence caused José to jump up in alarm and dart toward the door of the hut.

Around the corner strode a heavy-set man in the early forties—Don Joaquín, the owner of the hacienda. He was striking his tight leather trousers with his riding crop. His broad embroidered felt sombrero was pushed back on his high white forehead. His long-lashed eyes, though dark and liquid, were severe, an expression accentuated by his high aquiline nose—a handsome, cold, cruel face.

"What are you ducking in there for, José? What have you been up to?"

José pulled off his sombrero in enforced respect, his eyes cast down sullenly. "Nothing."

Don Joaquín drew down the corners of his thin mouth, otherwise his face was a dead mask.

"Ha! I remember! Rufo gave you extra work on the irrigation ditch. What are you doing in here this time of day?"

"Nothing, sir." José twirled his sombrero. "Tomorrow is the fiesta and —"

Still tapping his leg, Joaquín looked at José as at a cringing dog. To Esperanza, thoroughly frightened, his tapping seemed to be measuring out José's doom.

"What would the hacienda do if everybody were like you?" demanded Joaquín. "Answer me —"

José continued to stare at the ground. He muttered sullenly.

Without the slightest change of expression, Joaquín slashed

him in the face with his riding crop. "You good-for-nothing upstart!"

Esperanza felt the blow as though struck herself. Terrified, she whispered: "Be careful, José."

"Report to Rufo this instant," continued Joaquín. "Tell him you are to carry extra fodder to the corral tonight and stack corn in the silo until daybreak. There will be a good moon." He stroked his long hard chin. "Tomorrow at the fiesta, I'll have a special punishment for you."

Esperanza began to sob.

Don Joaquín gave her a swift glance. She was doubly pretty with tears in her frightened eyes, her bosom heaving, her firm, young breasts pushing out her black dress.

He strode off toward the Big House.

Esperanza found refuge in grandmother's arms.

The old woman tried to comfort her. "There, child—there, child —"

Joaquín's blow had suddenly made a full-grown man of José. His cringing disappeared. Hands in his pockets, a radiant fury in his countenance, he stared after the owner contemptuously. He pushed back his straw hat and wiped the blood from his face with his sleeve.

"Grain for the corral. Corn in the silo until daybreak—not much. I'm off this very minute to join Pancho Madero—out of this rat hole forever. Pepe can get drunk—he's old, anyway. But I'll fight. They'll pay. They'll pay. Don Joaquín, Rufo, and their kind, for every lash, for every hour of sweat and blood."

Approaching footsteps caused him to duck back into the hut.

Joaquín rounded the corner once more. He motioned to Esperanza. "Stand up."

She obeyed, smoothing down her dress, not lifting her eyes. Smiling sardonically, he raised her chin with his hand.

The gleam in his eyes frightened her. Laughing softly, he gave her a little shove.

She backed off, quivering like a new-born colt. Her hand fell on a thorny palo verde plant. She gave a cry of pain.

"Thorns wherever you go, little one." He laughed at his own sally. "Hm, I have an idea you need breaking in, my wench. How about after the dancing—up at the Big House—a little party?"

Esperanza's throat tightened. She stammered. "But I'm Luis' girl."

"Luis beforehand, eh? But I like fruit already plucked."

She went cold at the pit of her stomach. "You don't understand. We're to be married."

Joaquín's face relaxed into salaciousness. "Really!"

But without further word, he turned and went off.

Esperanza collapsed, sobbing. A minute before, despite José's trouble, she had been a girl, happy, hopeful. She was a woman now. Joaquín's words, his glance, his brutal cynicism had stripped off all the petals of her almost unaware innocence.

Grandmother rocked to and fro, her skinny arms locked about her body. "I told you, I told you," she moaned. "That owl—that owl —"

Esperanza daubed at her eyes with the hem of her skirt. "Hush, Granny, be still; for the love of God!"

José came to the door. "Help me—both of you."

Grandmother got up painfully, groaning, pain in her legs. "José, please go do what you are told. Don't —"

José snapped back. "I told you what I'm going to do. Get my blanket, clothes, food. Every minute is precious."

"I'll tend to everything!" cried Esperanza. "Sit still, Granny."

She darted into the dark, windowless hut. Too excited to know where to begin, she looked around helplessly at the miserable furnishings, then fell on her knees before a crucifix under which was burning a float lamp in a blood-red glass cup. The reddish glow fell on Esperanza's soft skin, glistened on her tear-stained cheeks. Her two little hands, held up palm to palm in supplication, she looked up at the crucifix. Her lips moved in silent prayer.

As she looked upon the suffering, wounded figure on the cross, the pain went out of her; strength came in. Pity for herself and for José was replaced by pity for an ancient agony. All things, however terrible, could be borne. She got up resolutely.

Quickly she rummaged through the room. Into a painted fiber bag, she stuffed José's few belongings, folded his frayed gray-blue sarape into a narrow strip to go comfortably over his shoulder. From a terra-cotta *olla*, she fished out the last half dozen tortillas, spread them with mashed, brown beans, shredded chile over them with her sharp fingernails—all the food they would have until tomorrow—and wrapped it in half a washed flour sack.

On second thought, she knotted a silver peso she had long been saving into one of the ends of the bundle, keeping only a few centavos for herself.

"Ready!" she called cheerily, appearing at the door.

"You're an enchantment. Now listen." He spoke in quick staccato. "If they come looking for me, I've gone off to work. Don't get yourselves into trouble on my account, and don't tell even Luis. Promise . . . and day after tomorrow," he continued, "tell my girl, Carlota."

José adjusted bag and sarape over his shoulder. "There's a good moon, not to work, but to travel fast. Once I get to Trocadero Canyon, I'll be all right."

Grandmother was trembling. Tears coursed down her cheeks. "My boy," she blubbered, "I'll pray for you."

José kissed her wrinkled cheek. "Don't pray. Use your head. I'll come back and string up Don Joaquín and Rufo and all the rest of them. The *cabrones*!"

Esperanza stroked his sleeve. "Be careful, won't you, José?"

"You're a lovely sister." He put his arms about her and kissed her.

The tears streamed down her cheeks. She snatched off her aluminum Virgin and put it around his neck. "Keep this, José. Promise me."

"Rot!—All right," he said, gruffly.

Peering first around the corner of the hut toward the Big House, he darted down the cactus lane and out into a field.

Rey looked after him with cocked ears, then gave a questioning glance at the others.

Esperanza could hear José running. For years she was to remember the sound of his running sandals, of men running, running away from slavery, running into death, into roaring cannon, running to some unseen destiny. Mexico was an abyss. It cracked apart. Men were plunging into the abyss. Darkness lay upon the land.

III

Grandmother and Esperanza resumed their work in silence, their hearts heavy.

What was making Luis so late, worried Esperanza. Had something happened to him also? The day now seemed all awry.

The colors on the majestic volcanoes were changing. The

lower valley was now plunged into shadow, except for bright patches of vague silver haze. Stray clouds were touched with a blood-red glow—as though dipped in human sacrifice to the gods.

For the moment, peace returned to Esperanza. Grandmother, too, worried though she was about José, gradually bowed her spirit to the inevitable with the calm of all her people, as she had done all her life.

She wove and wove. She began thinking of straw mats—a trick the mind has of avoiding sadness and recovering tranquillity.

The reeds, from out of the mire of a distant river, nearly a day's foot-journey away, were cut, dried, then re-moistened during the weaving. A mat brought eight centavos on the hacienda, thirty in the city, but the reeds cost four, unless you cut them yourself.

She loved the rich straw odor. A freshly made mat seemed to make the body that rested on it clean and spry again. In time a mat gathered the smell of the earth on which it was laid and the smell of the body, and of the love acts performed on it. It gathered the blood-stains of childbirth. Straw mats were bed and nuptial couch, hospital and shroud.

Old mats had their death-knell uses. They were tied at the corners with maguey fiber to carry bundles. Old fragments covered crannies to keep out the chill upland air and rain. Though timber was plentiful, the hacienda owner, Joaquín de la Selva, wouldn't let the peons fell a single tree, not even for coffins; so the corpses of loved ones were wrapped in the mats that had been their beds when they were quick; they were rolled up, just like meat in a corn tortilla, and lowered into the fresh earth; then the one dearest to the deceased cast a single white flower on the cylindrical figure ere the clods closed over it forever. Soon, pondered grandmother, she in turn would be wrapped up in a straw mat for her last sleep.

Esperanza, too, sometimes thought about mats. They were deeds woven into a pattern, save that life had more frayed ends and the weaving was never done.

She looked over at Pepe's corn-husk cross with its orange and white flowers. Corn was life; it was man and god, the very flesh of food and soul—so she felt, although she could not have expressed it thus. Every year, they dug up first spring shoots and took them to San Isidro. She loved to finger the silken tassels, to watch the ears swell until the corn was white and milky. She

loved the husking days when she and both grandparents would strip off the stiff, yellow crackling husks and rub the ears together to free the kernels. Her nostrils tingled with the memory of the white chaff. The corn was kept in baskets they wove themselves from thin reeds, dyed red and green and yellow. The stripped cobs, last year, had given miraculous nourishment to their pig. This year they had had to eat him and could not afford to buy a young one.

The grinding of corn, the base for each meal, occupied many waking hours. The grains were soaked overnight in lye water to soften the hard shell. Long before dawn the two women were up grinding on the metate, a gray porous volcanic stone, with four carved legs and hammock-shaped surface. This took hours, for the corn had to be pounded and rolled until it was a fine smooth paste without the slightest coarseness.

After that, a little lump of dough was patted into an oval until the little cake grew flatter and rounder, finally paper thin. It was nice, early dawn or late twilight, to hear from neighboring huts, the pat-a-pat-pat of tortillas in the making—a joyous sound that handclapping, of people filled with glee, knowing their bellies would be warm and full. When the huts were silent before harvest time, that meant that bellies were empty, the mouth dry, the cheeks drawn with hunger. There was no more corn. Sometimes whole months passed by like gaunt spectres.

How good tortillas tasted piping hot! When finally shaped, the flat unsalted dough cake was flung on the hot tin comal and baked. It was served with the meal or rolled into tacos with chile-and-meat filling. Chile could be gathered wild by walking two hours down into the hotter Cuatla Valley, where the morning glories grew big as trees. When meat was lacking—usually the case—the tortilla was merely smeared with hot chile sauce.

All life revolved around corn. Esperanza had heard that the gods made the first man out of corn. She wanted to ask Father Mateo about this, but some mysteries one did not even tell the good priest—strange things the neighbors sometimes whispered about when no white folks or mixed bloods were around.

With a half-tilt of her head, Esperanza finally held off her work.

Her thoughts grew practical. Quietly she announced to grandmother:

"We have no corn left to be ground up, not a bit of food."

"Tomorrow we will kill one of the chickens."

"But we have only three left." Esperanza pounded her mat with a stone.

"Tomorrow is the fiesta. We should eat well on Guadalupe day."

At last Luis came—a tall youth, nearly thirty, with fine light brown features and soft curly black hair. His handsome face was sensitive but firm; his body was quick, his bearing alert. He was dressed in clean blue overalls. Two knotted ends of a narrow horsehair band dangled from the brim of his broad Texas Stetson. He carried a small bundle and guitar.

Esperanza jumped up happily, but when she flung herself into his arms, she sobbed.

He stroked her smooth black hair. "Light of my life! What is wrong?"

"I've been thinking of you all afternoon, wishing you'd come."

"Is that a thing to weep about? What is the matter?" He lifted her chin with his hand—this recalled Don Joaquín.

She shivered, but said gaily enough: "We've all been thinking of the fiesta tomorrow."

Luis watched her closely. Sitting down on the boulder, he crossed his legs and lit a cigarette. "I saw Pepe going into town—to buy candles." He laughed.

"It's not so funny, Luis."

Luis balanced the stem of his guitar against the rock. "Let him forget in his own way."

"He never forgets. He just thinks he does."

"You're right." Luis stared thoughtfully. "Pepe was made to be a free man, not a clod."

Grandmother spoke up harshly. "He drinks, and we go without corn."

"As bad as that?" Luis turned to Esperanza seriously. "We've got to get married soon." He frowned at his cigarette. "Lego-retto, on the Rosales hacienda, has a plot I can have on shares, good soil. The house is small, but big enough for all of us."

Esperanza clasped her hands. Her eyes glistened happily. She sat on the ground beside the boulder and rested her head on Luis' knee. He stroked her hair.

The pink faded from the clouds. Darkness had crept up almost to the crest of the lower mountains.

Esperanza sat up with a jerk. "Don Joaquín sent poor José off to work till daybreak, though tomorrow is a fiesta."

"So that's why you were crying, my sweet? José has a hot-headed streak. If he keeps on in his resentful way, they'll break him."

"But it's so unfair. Don Joaquín gave orders to Don Rufo to punish him tomorrow. That means a flogging or worse."

Luis nodded glumly. "Let's hope Don Joaquín forgets. I'll put in a good word with Rufo. He's a brute, but he likes me . . . Let's stroll."

They walked up the lane—the way José had gone. Again Esperanza heard his running feet. She swallowed hard. But the twilight, now full, calmed her. The Big House was just a dark blotch. The chapel vesper bell lowed in the warm air. The nearer ridges had become a cold, slaty blue black; the colors on the crest of the volcanoes had changed rapidly from heliotrope to purple. The balmy air was saturated with the scent of cowdung and goats, fruit and brush smoke.

Luis stumbled over a rock. "The holy stones of Milpa Verde!" he ejaculated facetiously. "Nothing but stones."

"They *are* holy, though," said Esperanza.

Luis liked the old legends. "Yes, the story is that one of the goddesses of the ninth heaven gave birth to a stone instead of a child. The other gods, frightened and disgusted, hurled it out of Heaven. It fell on Milpa Verde and broke into ten thousand fragments. That's precisely the reason we have so many stones. Some day, they say, these stones will awake and become gods again."

Down the lane drifted the hum of voices—soft, Oriental-sounding speech—the ancient Nahuatl tongue. From thatched huts came the pat-a-pat-pat of corn tortillas in the making. Peons coming in from distant fields were sadly chanting the *alabada*, the evening hymn. At one hut a dog rushed out barking, then wagged his tail on recognizing them.

"Good night," came a soft voice from behind the glow of a cigarette at the door of a large hut.

"Good night, Don Clemente."

Further on, they stopped at the hut of Don Alvaro, a short black-bearded man with iron specs, who carved saints and masks for the fiestas.

"Look at this!" he cried, showing them a Virgin in blue-starred robe.

"What a sweet expression you have given her!" cried Esperanza.

Don Alvaro beamed and showed them his masks, laid out on his porch for the morrow's fiesta. He rented them for all such performances. Bearded masks of white Spaniards, dark frowning masks of Moors, negroes with scarlet lips and staring white eyes; masks of tigers, deer, coyotes, panthers. Luis laughed and joked about them. Alvaro, an honest old soul, vain about his artistic efforts, basked in their enthusiasm.

The two lovers walked the length of the rocky lane, occasionally pausing to chat with neighbors. A feeling of festivity was in the air.

A tall, broad-shouldered young Indian swung past with a thud of sandals.

"Hello, Ignacio," said Esperanza, cordially, but Luis greeted him stiffly. Ignacio had once been a suitor of Esperanza's.

Now and again other figures passed them, erect in snowy garb—ghost-like among the gray-stone walls; bare feet or sandals padding in the volcanic sand of the path. The figures appeared swiftly, melted away unobtrusively, a passing that symbolized a race moving quietly, melting away, then coming up again purified, like some underground stream.

As Luis and Esperanza neared home again, hand in hand, Esperanza looked up at the stars now glistening brightly. They seemed to jump—like golden grasshoppers. And all the wide heavens were theirs—hers and Luis', too.

The air was chillier. Grandmother was coughing. Esperanza hastened to get a light blanket for her thin shoulders. Then she stuck pitchy ocote wood in the door stones and lit it, making a smoky but bright torch.

In as casual tone as she could muster, she said to Luis. "Don Joaquín looked at me so oddly today, it made me shiver." Immediately she was sorry she had spoken, for she feared what Luis might do. "It was after he threatened José," she added hastily.

"You are very pretty. It is natural he should notice you." He spoke lightly, but was upset. "Look what I brought you."

He unrolled the package and shook out a China Poblana dancing dress, red, white and green skirt, covered with golden spangles; a blouse lavishly embroidered and beaded.

Esperanza was awed. She put out her hand almost timidly. "Why Luis! It's the loveliest thing I've ever had. But we need every cent. You —"

"I couldn't resist. I bought it last week in Amecameca."

Esperanza let the dress ripple through her fingers, then held it against her cheek. In the torch light, her face caught fire from the bright colors. "It's lovely, lovely." She threw her arms about him.

"You'll be the best looking girl in fifty miles," he said gruffly.

Holding the skirt up against her, covering half her body, she took a few proud steps with a sway of hips. Then, in a dutiful manner, she folded it up. "Luis, I'll always be good to you and help you and never get cross. Whatever you want will be what I want." Her little heart swelled with tender happiness. But as she laid the dress carefully away, she thought again of José, of his running feet. "Poor José! I hope —"

"Don't worry, little darling. I'll talk to Rufo. Come—I've brought my guitar."

Luis bent over the instrument, thrumming the strings. His long, curly hair fell into his eyes. He shook it back, a handsome gesture. "Here's a new song from Guadalajara:

*Tengo amores mas bonitos y mejores
Que me queden y me saben bien tratar,
Y por hay dicen que me vas á abandonar
No has de ser tú que me has de hacer llorar.*

Esperanza applauded. "It's fine, though I don't like the words."

The moon was coming up big and orange through the pine trees along the gully—the way José had gone.

Grandmother suddenly nodded her head, just like a billygoat, and complained. "The hoot-owl—it is my last fiesta, or perhaps Pepe's, or perhaps they'll catch José."

Luis' eyes darted back and forth between her and Esperanza. "Catch José? What do you mean?"

"Why—Why—," she cackled, stammering through her toothless gums. Luis was Esperanza's sweetheart, but he was also a foreman and a mestizo, of mixed blood—one never knew just how such people would act.

Esperanza avoided Luis' sharp glance. "José ran off tonight to join Pancho Madero."

Luis was piqued. "Why did you hide this from me?"

"He made us swear to tell no one, not even you. He's gone, Luis."

"My God, there's a cordon out!" He laid down his guitar. The moonlight flooded his handsome bronzed face. "Tell me everything. Perhaps I can help. Which way did he go?"

Esperanza motioned toward the pine trees where the gully ran.

"The worst possible direction!" exploded Luis.

"What will they do if he is caught?" she breathed, frightened.

He started to tell her that over on the Rosales hacienda, they had shot three peons who had tried to run off to the revolution. Instead, he said, "Let's hope he gets away." He toyed with a silver peso. "Why in God's name didn't he tell me what he was planning to do?"

"You know why. You are a foreman."

"But we stand together in everything. José should have known that." He tossed his peso into the air and caught it decisively. "I'm a foreman, and I have to keep mum as a stone and be a slave driver and reap the hatred of the very men I'd like to help."

Grandmother broke in querulously. "Everyone is going crazy."

"They should," retorted Luis. "The whole country is stirring—a wind out of nowhere. Men are lifting up their heads again. If I had known, I would have gone with Luis myself."

"No!" cried Esperanza.

The ocote torch flickered. Luis stared at the last gleaming sparks. "José is a real man. Sooner or later we must all go."

"But you were just talking of leasing land and getting married."

He put his arm about her tenderly. "I hope it can be so, darling. But things are breaking up everywhere—fast. Not only Madero in the north, but some fellow named Zapata in the south, is up in arms. There's a rebel force in Puebla. Bandits have sprung up around the volcanoes. Anything may happen. My real place is beside José."

Esperanza trembled. What a terrible day! Nothing but bad news, trouble. "You frighten me, Luis. What would I do without you?"

Luis responded doggedly, eyes and mouth stern. "The more I think of it, the surer I am that I must go. I'm no Rufo. I can't stand these brutalities. . . . How did Joaquín look at you to-day?" he burst out and caught her harshly by the wrist. "Tell me."

In this mood, he was a black cataract of force. "You are hurting me."

"Tell me."

"He—he said something about my going up to the Big House. I told him I was your girl. He laughed and went away."

Luis dropped her wrist, his face haggard. "We are slaves. If he really took the whim, what would my rights mean? Our love? Nothing."

"He won't do anything." She tried to calm him. "Let's hope."

"The curse is on us." Luis clenched his fists and strode to and fro violently. "If that gentleman animal—God, I'll kill him."

Esperanza sat still, face blanched.

Grandmother wailed through her querulous mouth. "And last night—the hoot-owl —"

Luis sat down glumly. "Superstitions, ignorance, betrayal! And to think Don Porfirio Díaz was once one of us, from the soil, out of poverty; but he, too, keeps us in chains. If one of our own kind does that to us, what can we hope for?"

Grandmother looked around apprehensively. "Sh, Luis—not so loud. Good Don Porfirio is not to blame, only those around him."

Luis answered sharply. "What do you know about it? He helps the white foreigner, not us. He has fed the soil of his own beloved land with the blood of tens of thousands of his brothers. Our blood cries out from slave camps all over the land."

The moon rose higher above the pine trees—beautiful, still, peaceful. But in men's hearts there was no peace in the whole wide land.

Gazing at the mountains, though, Esperanza was thrilled and cried: "Look, the volcanoes, all silver, silver snow at the crest!"

"Beautiful!" Luis hummed a tune:

God of the Smoking Mountain,
Spare us yet awhile,
Spare the sons of your solitude,
Not yet have we grown sinful,
Spare us yet awhile.

"Yesterday one of the Indian woodmen down from Huetantzincó told me that when the God of the Smoking Mountain grows angered at his people, he will hurl down poisonous smoke and burning stones and boiling lava—he has done it before—and

wipe them out in a single night . . . It's coming I guess . . . When the lava cools, Xochiquetzal, Goddess of Flowers, and Flaloc, the Rain-God, will come strewing bronze violets and white lilies, and the lilies will be women breasted like the sun, and the violets will become men with tireless loins—a race more splendid than any. The peons will be free—no more serfs. There will be plump corn and fat deer and magic music. Then the great Smoke Mountain will waken his sleeping companion, and they will vanish from the eyes of mankind—like all things enchanted.”

“I should hate for them to disappear.” Esperanza clasped her hands.

Luis hummed again. “God of the Smoking Mountain, spare us. Not all our gods were ignoble. Besides Huitzilopochtli, the ferocious War-God of human sacrifice, we had gentle Quetzalcoatl, lover of flowers and animals and men.”

Grandmother woke up from a reverie. “Huitzilopochtli? Now you are talking about the big stone up at the Big House.”

“A frightful thing—so many carved serpents,” appended Esperanza.

“So, you know about the stone idol there. When did you see it? Tell me,” insisted Luis suspiciously, thinking back on Don Joaquín.

Esperanza looked at him with clear affectionate eyes. “Everybody knows the many strange tales about the stone idol. We’ve all been there.”

Grandmother cackled at some memory. “Hee! Hee! When I was stronger I used to do the washing for the Big House, and Esperanza—she was a very little girl—went with me. Everybody liked her. Those days Don Joaquín’s mother was alive. Such a nice woman. She used to take Esperanza into the big salón and give her candies and playthings. But that ugly stone—I used to cross myself every time I saw it.”

Luis nodded. “It is evil looking.” He stroked Esperanza’s soft throat.

She looked up, smiling, happy.

A slight odorous breeze slid over the silver-plated fields, through the corn milpas, whispering legends of this land of strange gods and rough hills and fantastic vegetation, of cactus and maguey and thorny palo verde. The mystery of it nestled about them.

Luis took up the thread of their conversation. “This idol, they

say, came from the pyramids. In the old days Huitzilopochtli squatted among the clouds, looking down at his people, glad of the smoking human hearts the priests flung at his feet, glad people had courage to die. When we get back that courage —”

“But how do you suppose such a big stone ever got on top of the pyramids?” asked Esperanza.

Luis said there were many legends—that it had ridden there on the back of Tonatiu, God of the Sun; others, that it sprang full-grown from a bunch of feathers in the girdle of Coatlicue, Mother of all the gods.

“Some say,” croaked grandmother, “that at night Huitzilopochtli goes abroad and kills cattle.”

“And eats human hearts!” echoed Esperanza. Goose flesh came out all over her skin.

“And rapes virgins,” croaked grandmother.

Luis laughed. “And drinks the blood of babes. Great Huitzilopochtli, God of the Mexicans!” His voice harshened.

“And Bobo?” inquired Esperanza, in a hushed tone.

“So you’ve heard that story, too? Bobo, they say is the child of Huitzilopochtli and a cow. Ugh!”

Grandmother piped up in a thin voice. “Some say, of Huitzilopochtli and María Teresa, the witch woman.”

Esperanza whispered, frightened. “María Teresa said that last night Huitzilopochtli chased her from the river almost to her house, that he’d done that many times, that once he caught her—but of this she will not speak. Last night she said the river was red as burning copper. When the God went away, she heard him laugh.”

Grandmother rocked to and fro, working her lips over her toothless gums. “There’s a huge stain of blood on top of the idol.”

“Let’s forget this nonsense.” Luis picked up his guitar and thrummed the strings softly.

The night was beautiful. Silver radiance lay over everything. The path—before disappearing beyond the organ cactus—was a white strip. The leaves of a false pepper tree gleamed. The moon moved majestically. Despite its quiet peace, the world seemed to move also. The trees moved, the mountains moved—like caravans. The cactus hedge and fences moved. The trees moved faster, seemed running.

Once more Esperanza heard the feet of José, running, running, running away. That year of 1910, all Mexico was running.

IV

Down the lane came a rebozo-hooded woman, carrying an ocote torch that flickered in the dark like an errant star. Rey let out a low growl.

"María Teresa," whispered Esperanza.

"Treat her nice," warned grandmother.

María Teresa, the witch woman, peered at them through straggling unkempt hair. Her torch lit up the doorway group. The cactus fence writhed into fantastic shapes.

In a shrill cordial voice, she cried, "Good evening, Don Luis. Good evening, Grandmother. Good evening, Esperanza."

Her white one-piece dress, cut square over her buxom bosom, was embroidered with red patterns of birds and flowers; her skirt was full, bulging, many-pleated. A plump woman with a sinking air, she seemed to walk with her flesh instead of her legs. She reminded Luis of a buzzard with neck feathers ruffled. She made Esperanza—who liked her, for she was a jovial, if uncanny soul—feel creepy.

María Teresa was feared for her black magic. She gave love potions, caused injury to enemies. In her hut was a miraculous image to which it was wise to make offerings. She sold amulets, "wind-stones," to keep people from being "hit by the air" and thus falling ill; "deer-eyes"—a hard fruit pit—for warding off the evil eye, and medicinal herbs.

Now, holding up the torch in a sinister pose, she remarked: "It will be a fine fiesta tomorrow—God willing." Her sharp little eyes jerked from one to the other.

"The fiestas nowadays—" began grandmother.

"Look!" cried Esperanza, and shook out her spangled dress.

"Wonderful!" gloated María Teresa. She smacked her big lips. "Did you ever? Why, you'll look simply gorgeous, my dear."

"But the fiestas nowadays—" began grandmother.

María Teresa gargled deep in her throat. "If the men don't get too drunk, it will be all right; and if they do, it will be all right."

"It will be a fine fiesta," insisted Esperanza.

María Teresa grinned at her out of her big crooked mouth. "To be sure, because you are in love. I was in love once."

Esperanza resented her tone. "You mean you don't love Arnulfo any more?"

Arnulfo, María Teresa's husband, had recently taken up with young Lolita and had even brought her into his home. All the village tongues were wagging. But María Teresa went about the same as ever, as though still mistress of her own hut.

Now, María Teresa retorted scornfully. "Who said anything about Arnulfo? I said I was in love once. I didn't say with whom."

She lifted her torch in an oracular manner. "It will be a fiesta as never was. Strange things will happen at it. I see trouble, much trouble for you, Esperanza, and for you, Luis."

She came closer to Esperanza, peered at her sharply, and intoned in a sepulchral voice: "The stone idol is walking abroad tonight. That always means something."

"Poppycock!" scoffed Luis.

María Teresa stuck her sharp face, beady eyes and thick lips close to his. "Don't jeer, young man. The time will come when you will believe. Listen!" Her voice came hollow out of the cavern of her mouth. "What's that?"

They heard a noise in the brush beyond the cactus.

Luis laughed derisively. "Some dog, or a pig."

"Remember, I warned you about tomorrow."

Esperanza wanted to tell her about her troubles and get her advice. Surely this woman, who knew so many dark secrets could give her a hint as to José's fate.

"We would all be happy at the fiesta if it weren't for José." She hastened to explain that he was to be punished.

María Teresa, all sympathy, became just another grieving peasant woman. Sticking her ocote torch in a crack, she put her arms about grandmother. "Ay, my poor Granny. Poor José! But I'll put a black spell on them all yet."

A male voice called through the dark.

María Teresa snatched up her torch. "My man—he's waiting. Adios. I'll see you at the fiesta. There's an early mass."

After she left, Esperanza remained thoughtful. María Teresa seemed to know about so many things that puzzled Esperanza deeply, things about which you didn't dare talk to Father Mateo. For instance, Esperanza knew quite well that every being's shadow-spirit, usually in the form of some animal, followed wherever one went and could protect or injure. For a small fee,

María Teresa would propitiate one's spirit. And the stones and trees and rivers—all had spirits. Esperanza and her kind lived in an awesome animal world: the very stones had life.

In the back of San Benito chapel were several large carved stones which the Indians kept decorated with flowers. Old bearded Alvaro rented out a stone idol to make the bees hive. At the proper times of the year there were sacred rites for the God of the Spring—a village secret, unknown even to Father Mateo. Not all the old gods had died, though when one broached such things to the good Father, he merely lifted his eyes in holy scorn. Life, thought Esperanza, was a very mysterious business.

"What in the world are you dreaming about?" asked Luis.

He reseated himself on the rock and thrummed his guitar.

The soft tones floated through the balmy air, seeming to intertwine with the silver moonlight.

Esperanza again leaned her head against his knee. Grandmother sat like some ancient wood carving, utterly motionless. Occasionally an ocote torch flickered down the lane, or a dog barked.

Luis struck up *La Guinda*:

In your red lips,
In your white teeth
Of your sweet mouth—
Sweet, sweet, sweet—
Trembled a red cherry,
Red, red, red —

He was interrupted by cracked laughter, a few broken bars of drunken song, then loud curses.

Pepe stumbled in on the heels of his own curses—a slight figure, shading a candle with his wax-like hands. He wavered toward them around the cactus fence, with many false steps, stops and starts. He confronted the palo verde tree with great hauteur, addressed low insulting words to it. Then his head sank down like a billygoat ready to charge. He threw up his hands like a man drowning and almost extinguished his candle.

He stared around, white hair ruffled. "Bobo, that damned fatherless dwarf, now where'd he go?"

In the distance shrill laughter, like a coyote's howl, long drawn out and mournful, echoed far across the ridges that rose, dark as waves in a tempest toward the majestic calm volcanoes.

Pepe shuddered. "Ugh! Why do I go around with that son

of a cow? Yes, siree, the son of a cow." He swayed uncertainly, hiccoughed, then shouted at those in front of the hut. "Ho, Sons of He-goats. Viva Pancho Madero! Viva! Viva!"

Luis grabbed him. "Shut up —"

Pepe pulled away. Eyes glued to his candle flame, he walked around in a circle. "Ho, I see the star of Bethlehem. I'm a shepherd following a star." He rocked, hiccoughing, in front of grandmother. "Ho, she-mule! See, I brought candles for the fiesta. Isn't this a candle? Hey, answer me, she-mule—" He broke off in a shout. "Viva Pancho Madero!"

Again Luis grabbed him. "Don't shout that name."

Pepe pulled hard to free himself from Luis' iron grasp. "Don't like it, eh? I'll shout if I want to. If you don't like it, I'll fight you."

Luis laughed. "I wouldn't fight you, Pepe. I love you too much."

Grandmother was angry to weeping. "*Ay de mi*, with his gray hairs!" She got up, groaning, putting a sustaining arm about Pepe.

Maudlin, he sobbed remorsefully. "Granny, don't jabber at me, little she-mule. It's the tequila, the red hot tequila, pulling at my throat."

"Hush!" Grandmother led him into the hut. Rey followed them in.

Within, he sang and shouted, till his voice died away in a whimper. From time to time there were fragments of maudlin song, weaker and weaker "Vivas" for Madero. Then all was quiet.

Esperanza was silent, utterly shamed by Pepe's spectacle.

Divining her thoughts, Luis tenderly stroked her hair.

Even with the reassurance of his embrace, she could hardly keep her tears back. In her heart was a dark premonition of more and more trouble. The gods did not intend to let her and Luis be happy.

She tried to look down the years for them both. They must not let their lives get twisted. She thought of the shadow-spirit in all things, in the very stone on which they were sitting. She remembered her few remaining coins. Perhaps there was enough to take to María Teresa and have her propitiate the shadow souls of Luis and herself and help José. Tomorrow she would also make an offering to San Agustín, or perhaps to Pepe's cross standing there, the cross of her own people. Pepe's cross.

She started to tell Luis of her plan, then stopped. He would not understand at all, even less than Father Mateo. But because he would not understand and yet she could do this for him which he could not do for himself, she loved him even more.

Black clouds blotted out the moon. Scattered drops fell. They looked at each other tenderly, faces close. Her eyes were moist and forlornly happy.

He kissed her good night, and she went into the hut where Pepe was now snoring loudly in drunken stupor.

She was hungry but there was nothing to eat.

Instead she untied her coins and counted them, then prayed for José's safety.

V

Curled up with Rey, like a kitten, on her mat, her only covering an old skirt of grandmother's, Esperanza went to sleep with her cheek against Luis' China Poblana dress.

She dreamed she was carrying big rolls of straw mats on her back. Luis came up smiling on a big white horse and took her bundle. Her dress caught on the thorns, making a big rent. She was very embarrassed because she had no petticoat underneath. Luis helped her unfasten her skirt, but when she smiled into his face to thank him, he had become Don Joaquín. Stepping back, he flogged her with a big lash.

She woke up with a panting cry, freezing cold. The damp chill oozed up from the ground. The old skirt did not give much warmth. Her face felt feverish; her body grew colder and colder. She whimpered and hugged herself tighter.

She could stand it no longer. Hearing the first rockets exploding for the fiesta, she got up stiffly from her hard bed. Numb with cold, she threw open the door of the hut.

It was still dark. Dampish fog bellied into her face. Rey ran out eagerly.

Already hooded figures were trotting toward the chapel, carrying baskets of flowers and unlit candles. The rustle of their sandals on the stones went by continuously.

Esperanza considered. Should she go to the chapel or light a fire in the tin brazier? But there was no coffee. She recalled having saved a little cinnamon bark. She fumbled at a ceiling-suspended shelf, finally came upon a small package in yellow

newspaper. She smelled it. Not much left, but it would make a few warm cups. Why save it any longer?

She laid several ocote splinters in the brazier and covered them with fine charcoal. Into a red olla of water, she shook the cinnamon bark to the last grain of powder. She fanned vigorously until the coals were all aglow.

Seizing up a bundle of flexible twigs, she sprinkled and swept the space in front of the hut.

The deep indigo of the sky became lighter; the stars disappeared. Fleecy clouds caught a glow of rose. Silver tinged the snow and ice of the volcanoes. Then the crest of the Smoke Mountain took on an intolerable sheen as the light of the hidden sun slithered along the snow. Suddenly the sun's rim poked out; the full burning circle of it leapt free from the mountain.

As if timed to this momentous event of nature, a whole cloud of rockets burst deafeningly into the air in big, white puffs. Around the chapel were rows and rows of peons, whole families, wrapped in sarapes, beside them their bundles, pots, dogs. Some had their braziers already lit.

With a shock, Esperanza recalled she had not brought the chickens into the hut the night before. With so many strange people about, they were surely stolen. She hurried back around the hut, her heart in her mouth.

But the three fowls, which always roosted in the palo verde tree, were bravely scratching around the doorstep. She breathed a sigh of thankful relief. Searching the straw at the corner of the hut, she found an egg—a godsend.

The tea was now boiling merrily. Grandmother was up, massaging her thin legs, groaning pitifully.

Pepe grunted, rolled over in his sarape, presently sat up, rubbing his sagging red eyes. He held his aching head. The white strands of his stringy moustache drooped lugubriously. He scratched himself and coughed and coughed and spat and spat.

With a small earthen jar, decorated with white glazed pigeons, Esperanza dipped out tea for him. Setting the curved-bottom jar down carefully so it would not tilt over, he held his chilled hands over the steaming top. When the jar had cooled enough, he took it in his two hands and held it for a long time, warming his fingers. Finally he sucked the tea down with long smacks of satisfaction.

Esperanza and grandmother, after drinking their sugarless tea,

pulled their rebozos about their heads, and taking two of the candles Pepe had brought—he watched them slily out of the corner of his eye—they went over to the chapel.

A mass of ragged people eddied about the door. From within, chanting rose in Indian shrillness. Around the corner, to the tune of armadillo guitars came dancers, rigged up in feather head-dresses with mirrors and shells, flannel shirts, red knee trousers, pink cotton stockings, and executing shuffling heel-and-toe steps.

Behind came a troop of women—in their rebozos, like a flock of restless bluebirds—with baskets of corn and other fruits of the field. Ordinarily grandmother and Esperanza would have been with them, but this year they had not been able to save anything—Pepe had used so much up in drinking, so they went in with strangers from other parts.

The entrance crowd made way for the dancers, followed by Indians, staggering under big, newly painted crosses. These were to be blessed, for a fee, and reset at the entrances to the village. The dancers swept into the church, whirled before the altar, guitars thrumming. The women laid their fruits and flowers before the various saints. The two crosses were sprinkled by his reverence, Don Mateo, a dignified, elderly man with a little pot belly, sleek gray hair and polished jowls, scrubbed, radiant and jovial.

Grandmother and Esperanza wriggled into the church, blazing with candles, a sea of uplifted hands. In the dimness of the early morning light, the gold and black interior was weirdly beautiful.

The two women dipped their fingers into the stone holy-water basin, then edged over to Saint Anthony where they lit their candles. Three times they touched their foreheads to the dusty floor. On their knees, hands pressed palm to palm in prayer, they remained until Mass should begin. A neophyte snuffed out their candles and took them away in a big basket, to be melted down, reshaped and resold. Other worshippers replaced them with dozens more. The sweating neophyte had hard work to remove them fast enough to prevent undue waste.

Esperanza was praying fervidly for José. She prayed that he would reach Madero safely, that Madero would win, even though Father Mateo had told the people Pancho Madero was a

very wicked man; that he and every one of his followers would go straight to hell.

This made her think of José. Two tears trickled from her eyes. Anyone seeing her thus, her face so sweetly framed in her blue rebozo, would have thought her lovely beyond words—so gentle and beseeching, so filled with reverence and sorrow and youth. Mass was to begin. Father Mateo appeared again, his finely wrinkled face, full and cherubic. His tight lips and leonine nose, slightly reddish, his thin silver hair, plastered down piously on either side of a middle part running back to his tonsure, made him look snug and deft and gently coarse. One eye drooped permanently, as though weary; as if he were laughing at his own precise posturing, a queer combination of benevolence and malice. When he laughed heartily, little wrinkles crinkled all over his face, usually so pacific, like waxed paper crumpled. Inside the crinkled paper, there was always an intense glow, of spirituality or something else. He had a ripe, fruity voice, mellow as a soft apple.

Most of the kneeling worshippers were stolid, bovine. No expression flickered over their broad faces, although their taut stillness revealed that even the lowest clod had a deep, quivering hope that he would be personally favored by God; that evils of hunger, ill-health and death might be warded off for the coming year. There was a special twelve-month dispensation at this fiesta, which accounted for such a large crowd from other parts of the valley.

After Mass, the two women found Pepe sitting in the sun, trying to recover from his aching head.

He handed them a few centavos, and Esperanza went back to the chapel where country folk had set up booths with sweetmeats, fruits, vegetables, and other products. She chose a mountain woman in tall cone-shaped sombrero and disorderly hair, for such as she sold more cheaply, and bought two pence worth of calabash flowers, then at Gracia's shop down the lane, a two-cent screw of flour.

She paused there to pass a few words with Arnulfo, husband of María Teresa. He was sitting uncomfortably on a box, a dirty cloth tucked into his collar, having his thatched black hair cut from his conical head by another peon. Two small urchins watched enviously.

Returning home, Esperanza caught the plumpest chicken and

twisted its head—this manner of killing preserved the blood, for all was precious.

Leaving grandmother on the steps to pluck the fowl, she went with a basket to the village outskirts to cut fleshy nopal cactus leaves.

Back at the hut, carefully she removed the big spines and cut the leaves into small squares to be boiled. She prepared a batter of flour and egg in which to fry the calabash flowers, then helped grandmother finish the chicken. No portion was wasted. The feet, head, and other stray parts would make broth. Even the intestines were carefully washed.

As they worked, they watched Pepe, his one piece of finery about his neck, a silk kerchief of strident pink, arrange his candles on an improvised altar in front of his cross. His stringy old face glowed with a sad, holy expression.

They could hear the twang-twang of the guitars. Rockets burst in air with loud detonations. The pork-grease odor from open cooking fires became more pervasive. It began to smell as well as sound like a fiesta.

Esperanza got Matilda, a neighbor girl, to go to the Huitzo creek, half an hour's walk, to bathe. Under her arm, she carried the China Poblana dress.

They went up the main cactus lane, past the golden dome of San Benito, down a little slope of hard ground to a dry wash of fine dark sand, slightly moist from last night's rain, then along the high banks, lined with large blue-green maguey plants, twisting up spider-like.

Mouse colored burros, bright tassels on their ears, pattered by, laden with blackish barrels of sweetish smelling pulque or water from the river.

Whole families were trooping in.

Each member of each group said a soft "*Buenos Días, niñas*" and the two girls replied in like manner.

From a little rocky promontory, with nothing but cactus and a few false-pepper trees, they short-cut across the tumbled pinkish rock surface that led down to the river, swinging dark around a low limestone bluff.

Women were washing or bathing. The white and pink and blue of scrubbed clothes were spread out on branches, rocks, and the stretch of golden sand.

Esperanza and Matilda slipped off their dresses and plunged

into the pool. The water, fresh from the mountain snows, was very cold, but after the first shock, delicious. Soon their bodies were all aglow.

The spot was lovely, the bank lined with magueys, straight-standing willows, pines, big ferns. The water was spangled with light and shade, flecked with leaves. For a long time Esperanza floated on her back as on a cushion, breathing in the balmy air, redolent with sage and dung and country laundry soap. As her breasts came up, little rivulets of water ran off them, and the sun came down warm, caressing; at other times the shadows dappled her flesh, which then took on a greenish brown glow. The sky above was filmy with noon-day heat. High up an occasional bird winged past or circled. The distant explosion of rockets came, cushioned in a silence broken only by the voices of the women washing clothes, a low hum that drifted dreamily across the placid surface.

After she and Matilda had splashed about and giggled awhile, they paddled to the shallow part of the pool, where the women were slapping clothes under little thatched coverings held up by tripods of rough poles. Here, the two girls soaped themselves all over, and sitting on under-water rocks, shampooed their hair.

They came out on the smooth stone shelf to dry, the breeze barely ruffling over them, the sun almost too warm.

Esperanza had a lovely body just rounding into womanhood, a soft, smooth olive skin, almost brown—a hint of cornfields and warm sun and earth—not a single blemish. Her little breasts were firm and swelling, her ankles slim, her legs perfectly shaped, gracefully turned to her full thighs. It was the first time she had ever really noticed her body. She blushed that she did so now, but was happy that it was nice—for Luis' sake.

Esperanza told Matilda all about Luis. Not having a sweetheart, Matilda listened enviously. Except for a good figure, Matilda was not pretty at all, her face badly pock-marked, had a lemon-squeezed expression. She was one of these little hoydens who peddle all the sex-gossip of their elders.

Now she was telling about the mistress of "Meester" Caldwell, the white American manager of the big Estrella sugar estate just south of Magdalena. A cousin there had told Matilda all the "dirt."

Caldwell's mistress, Pepita, it seemed had a trace of negro blood. Esperanza had seen her—weirdly beautiful and terrible,

though just a child, barely turned fourteen. Negro blood would explain Pepita's golden octoroon skin and full passionate lips, her loose-jointed roundness, neither Indian nor Spanish. There were quite a few mulattoes and zambos on the Estrella estate, and, of course, even more on the hot coast whence Pepita's mother had come. The Estrella workers had queer music, too; some blew on jars to accompany the drums into a galloping roar, a strange throbbing that rolled awesomely across the vast acres of the hot valley. The songs and dances of the Estrella folk were also different.

Matilda said that when the heavy drum music from the peon cabins was beating through the humid night—after the rain had stopped and the moon had come out—Pepita would slip out the back door to dance naked under the dappled light in a cluster of willow trees and shrubs.

Pepita's naked dancing filled Esperanza with a strange quivering—the tumult of her own young blood frightened her.

They lay there silent, drowsy. The sun was luxurious.

Esperanza plucked some leaves from an overhanging tree. Crushing them in her hand, she became aware of their powerful mint-like fragrance. Her nostrils quivered. She felt so alive. The recent feel of the cold water, then the sun, the bright colors, a strip of vivid blue wild flowers, the buzz of lazy insects, now the fresh odor of crushed leaves—everything filled her, for the moment, with sensuous happiness.

They combed out their hair. With a real thrill, Esperanza unrolled her China Poblana dress and shook it out before Matilda's gaping eyes. Esperanza was sorry not to have so much as a slip to go under it. She pulled it over her head. The woolen cloth tingled her flesh with quivering delight—it was Luis' gift.

"Lovely!" cried Matilda.

Very pleased, Esperanza led the way home, her hair loose down her back.

Before clambering down into the wash at the edge of the pink stone promontory, they could see the whole village, the grange and the fields, just like a map, narrow roads marked in white or red, a silver stream, rectangles of plowed land and of dead brown or green meadows, checkerboards of maguey plants, tufts of trees. The railway was ruled along in a gray brown line. The far hills were deep green, footstools for sharp blue crags. Everything was placid, even tinted by the clear light.

To the left toward the volcanoes, the sharp sun was shattered into the ground glass of silver haze; the two lofty cones were nude white women behind gauze curtains.

At the hut, Esperanza drew her hair down sleek from the crown over her ears and fastened it in the back in two firm disks, a style of hair-dressing still seen in old pre-Conquest stone carvings and in pictorial codices. Above her left temple, she made three flat spit-curls. At the back she fixed a red ribbon. Her long earrings—carefully hidden lest Pepe sell them to buy drink—were made out of tiny gourds, lacquered with flower designs and held together by fine gold chains—an adornment given her years ago by Don Joaquín's mother, now dead.

Inside, preparing the meal, Esperanza heard glad exclamations at the door. Her uncle Pablo, his wife Petra, and their three children had come from the neighboring Rosales hacienda.

The children crowded around Esperanza, and Pablo hugged her jovially. "The foxes caught the chickens in the coop," he cried.

He was a big, good-natured, flat-faced fellow, a huge countenance under a mat of stiff black hair. His hands were clumsy and knotted, his feet big; from his sandals his toes stuck out like big warts, the nails jagged from toil in the fields. He lived by a few country proverbs:

"Whoever gives bread to a strange dog loses the bread and loses the dog . . . Who doesn't weep doesn't suckle . . ." He was always humorously bemoaning ingratitude: "You raised crows and got your eyes pecked out."

He laughed when Esperanza told him he would have slim fare. "There's scarcely water enough for the chicken to drink, and the duck comes to swim; but we've brought food with us, thankee, señorita."

Petra, also stocky, with flat nosed face but small quick eyes half closed by high cheek bones bulging fat, was much shrewder and serious. She was very fond of Esperanza, whom she thought pretty and wise.

Petra's youngest, Antonia, a girl of three, her hair braided with red flannel cloth, was a speechless, thumb-sucking child, who stared solemnly and preferred to sit and play everlastingly with sticks and stones rather than move about. Pablo, Jr., was an embarrassed lad of ten, very obedient, anxious to please, always

eager to run errands, and hopeful, despite his bashfulness, that elders would pay attention to him.

Guadalupe, fourteen, three years younger than Esperanza, whom she worshipped and imitated, was pretty, fresh and light-hearted. Newly conscious of her womanhood, she carried herself flirtatiously. Her small bright eyes had a rebellious note, her little mouth drooped in a satirical way. Most people thought her too independent, though she had never done anything independent. She merely thought her parents dull and unreasonable.

Grandmother was unusually happy they had come. Whenever not thinking of José, she would mumble again and again: "It's a fine fiesta after all."

VI

Matilda, Esperanza and Guadalupe went to the chapel.

The old-fashioned Indian dancing with its monotonous weaving steps had ceased. The new-fangled schottishes, polkas and waltzes were starting up in the dance space under the decorated ramada. A little orchestra—guitar, violin, and drum—was playing on the raised platform. Dagger thrusts of sun cut sharply through the ramada branches. The tissue-paper tassels glowed with fire. Fire flashed in the bright beaded, rayon silk dresses of the dancers whenever they crossed a ray of light. Esperanza noted happily that she was the only one who had a China Poblana costume.

Various lounging males made pointed remarks to the girls. Guadalupe flashed them saucy glances, several times a sharp retort. Esperanza could not help walking a bit archly, better to display her dress and pretty ankles. Matilda giggled.

In the open space were two main groups, one of peons, laughing and drinking; and more in the foreground, petty officials of the hacienda, majordomo Rufo, the sheriff, the local judge and political boss, Luis and other foremen, quite a number of strangers, and several more favored peons, among them Arnulfo.

One visitor was playing a guitar and singing maudlinly. All were drinking copiously from a bottle of tequila. Luis, quite sober, gave Esperanza a sideways nod to indicate he would soon be over to dance.

The sheriff and judge were arguing playfully with salacious wit. The rest roared with laughter. The little sheriff, his weazened, half-bald, chin and Adam's apple indistinguishable, wore a

shoddy black and white check store suit with torn elbows, on which was pinned a large tin shield. He was one of these chicken-like men forever scratching around hastily everywhere for fear they are missing something.

The judge, big and jovial, was dressed in a funereal black suit, derby hat, a stiff not-too-clean white shirt with frayed cuffs, and a black wing tie. His white waistcoat, two buttons dangling loosely, spread over a paunch distended from heavy eating and much pulque drinking. His flesh seemed to move under his clothes; his large eyes hung in deep, brown bags under bushy iron gray eyebrows.

"Judge, you're drunk, damn' drunk," scolded the sheriff.

The judge spat out seeds from some grapes he had been greedily stuffing into his mouth. "I rather fancy this is a fiesta. C'n be as damn' drunk as I please, you flea-bitten drinker of holy oil."

A roar greeted this sally. The sheriff looked sheepish. "I'm just advising you, that's all."

The judge patted his big paunch and boomed. "You're the sheriff, but I—I'm the postmaster, telegraph operator, judge and boss of this here munishipality."

The sheriff showed protruding rat teeth with senile lascivity. "Judge, you're just plain drunk. What's more, I'm warning you, it ain't dignified for a public official to be intoshicated."

The judge flared up like lit powder. "You're drunk yourself, you lousy *cabrón*. You're a stealer of church tiles."

The sheriff shook his middle finger stiffly under the judge's nose, the other fingers folded into his palm—the most insulting of all Mexican gestures. "You're just a son of a he-goat."

The judge's neck muscles swelled furiously to purple.

The sheriff flashed his gun. "You're a disgrace to the community. I'll have to arrest you."

The judge reached for his own weapon.

A bystander, knowing his uncertain temperament, had lifted it. The others argued with the sheriff to put up his weapon, but he snapped. "Sons of he-goats, all of you. Don't hinder an officer of the law."

Music drifted over from the ramada. Rockets were bursting in air. Many people were arriving. The fiesta was going on nicely. But the laughing group around the sheriff and judge were intent only on the horseplay. In a world where reality is so uncertain,

where life has shapelessness due to lack of standards, in such a world, make-believe is often more real than reality.

The sheriff ordered the judge to come along to jail.

"But this is a fiesta, you rifler of contribution boxes," protested the judge. "Can't you get that through your nincompoop brain? Besides I'm the judge. If I'm arrested I can't try myself till I'm free, and I can't get free till I try myself."

The sheriff ripped off the bandanna from his neck and daubed at his eyes in mock sorrow. "Guess you'll have to stay in for life unless the President pardons you. My poor, poor friend." He burst into guffaws. His laughter reminded one of a rat gnawing.

The judge screwed up his moon-like face and struck a pose as though about to give a magic lantern lecture. "I've a wife and eight children." Then angry again, he roared out. "You impious brayer of tavern songs, you—" He spluttered and blubbered.

A whirl of ranchers galloped by in a cloud of dust.

"Come along," ordered the sheriff, poking his gun forcibly into the judge's fat ribs. "Besides you beat your mother-in-law when you're drunk, and she's my dear aunt. Why —"

"I drink so I can see double and beat her twice as much, you braying four-footed nightingale."

The sheriff poked his gun harder. Bystanders told him that a joke was a joke.

Among those who laughed most uproariously was Rufo, the majordomo, a short, brutal man with a head like a knotted cudgel, tough, reddish-brown skin, heavy jaw, flat nose, lecherous lips, gorilla-like arms. He winked at Luis.

"The judge has too big a paunch for a fight. Now me—I'd have taken the gun away and strangled the sheriff—like I did that tax assessor, and tumble him right into my graveyard."

Luis wished he could go over to the ramada to dance, but kept close to Rufo, hoping, at a jovial moment, to put in a word for José, in case he were caught.

Rufo was one of those blind human forces out of the mire of Mexican oppression—blind as a torrent pulled toward the sea inevitably. A braggart and a bully, he had physical strength and cunning and the power to back up his bravura. At the moment, he was amused by the horseplay, as the sheriff solemnly, if unsteadily, marched the judge off in the direction of the hacienda jail.

"The judge's spine has gotten buried under too much flesh," said Rufo loudly.

"Not everyone is Rufo," ingratiatingly remarked Arnulfo, with a respectful tilt of his broad, braided, black felt hat. Despite his wife being a great sorceress, to Rufo he spoke with real deference.

Rufo nodded. "And I'll strangle that worthless José Huitrón. Where do you suppose the leper is skulking?"

Arnulfo hinted that José had skipped off to the revolution.

Rufo bellowed. "He won't get far. I'll make crows meat out of him. Hey, you, Pedro," he called to a peon. "Chase down to the barracks and ask Captain Sacasa whether they've picked up José Huitrón yet. Tell him to get on his trail and drag him back here, dead or alive."

"Yes, sir." The peon twisted at his white shirt, eyes respectfully downcast.

Luis edged up to Rufo. "José is just a kid, and this is a fiesta. Let him off for once. He'll promise to behave."

Rufo growled. "Did I ask you for advice? He'll get double the number of stripes, and I'll rub in salt afterwards."

Luis persisted. "As a personal favor. He's Esperanza's brother. She's my girl. You were a peon once, Rufo."

Rufo let out a loud laugh, like a whale blowing water. "You tender-hearted imbecile. And I would be still a peon if it weren't for these two hands." He held out his hairy paws and gave a mighty gurgle. "Yeah, my mother was a peon girl. At fifteen, the hacendado took her. I was his kid, half peon, half Spaniard. At eighteen, they tried to give me my first flogging, but I broke loose and strangled my father blue. Then I took to the hills." Rufo loved to boast of that phase of his life. "I don't need a gun, just these two hands." Playfully he took Luis by the throat, bending him back.

Esperanza, just then passing back toward the hut, thought Rufo was really trying to hurt Luis and flung herself on him, kicking and scratching.

Rufo released Luis in amazement, then laughed. "Ho, little spitfire. It's lucky I'm in a good mood, or I'd strangle you both and feed you to the buzzards. But look who's here." His sides split with laughter.

The sheriff and the judge, arms about each other's necks, were coming back, singing raucously and happily.

The judge, seeing Arnulfo, stopped short, swaying uncertainly. "Come here, Arnulfo. What's this I hear about your having two wives?"

Arnulfo hitched his sarape and scratched his head perplexedly. Deep corrugated wrinkles in his forehead heightened the drollery in his face. "María Teresa, my old wife, asked for a vacation."

"You mean she left you, and you took little Lolita?"

Arnulfo scratched his tufted head again. "Not exactly, Judge. María Teresa is still in my house, María Teresa and Lolita, too."

"Impossible! Scandalous! María Teresa has always been a good wife, even if she is a witch."

"She can cook beans good." Why, Arnulfo thought desperately, did the judge have to be so prying? Whites and mixed-blood mestizos were all that way—wanted a reason for everything. To Arnulfo, adding Lolita to his menage had been as simple as taking a drink of water. He had wanted to. He had . . . María Teresa, a little sullen, had soon become agreeable. Now the two women were friends . . . He stumbled through an explanation:

"It's this way, Judge. María Teresa got me young; now she's getting on. And she wanders around alone at night. How do you expect me to sleep all alone these cold nights! But she cooks beans well, so I don't throw her out. Besides, it would make her sad."

"A nice how-to-do. Tell me, how about her cave up in Santiago?"

"She goes there whenever the spell is on her, but not all the time."

"I'll bet she makes a lot more money than you do, Arnulfo. I'll bet she's got a pot of gold hid away somewhere." The judge, calculating how he could lay hands on it, spoke sternly. "Do you realize, Arnulfo, that what you have done is against the morals of the village? Remember, María Teresa used to belong to one of the foremen. You ought to be proud of her."

Arnulfo continued eagerly. "I am. That's just the reason I'm not kicking her out. She has powerful connections, as it were. I want to show proper respect for my superiors." His voice sank to a whisper. "Besides, she works charms. I just have to be good to her."

The judge turned to a bystander. "Call María Teresa." To Arnulfo he added even more sternly. "This is utterly scandalous. I'll have to ask my friend here, the sheriff, to arrest you."

Arnulfo turned pale.

María Teresa came up. Her hair tumbled over her face in disorderly cascades. Sullen defiance gleamed in her sharp little eyes. Before people so important, she dug her toes into the sand and twisted at her rebozo, not daring to look at the judge lest he see the blaze of hate in her eyes.

"I heard you asked for a vacation."

"Yes, sir."

"Why?"

Everybody laughed.

Sudden realization that even her so-called superiors feared her dark magic caused her to straighten up abruptly.

"Don't make fun of me!"

Before the fierce gleam in her eyes, the judge stepped back, stammering. Perhaps he better not try any tricks on her. "I just wanted to know whether you liked the new arrangement."

"Yes, I'm training Lolita."

She lifted her hands in a convulsive claw-like gesture, and in a sepulchral voice and vacant gleaming stare, she ranted:

"There's blood in the North. Soon there'll be blood in the South."

"Pancho Madero!" cried the judge, frightened.

Pompous, at heart he was a thorough coward. He was terribly afraid the revolution might succeed, and he would lose his various jobs.

Rufo let out a gurgling laugh, "Judge, even *she* got your goat."

Visitors rode up, the man known as the white "Meester" and his mistress, Pepita, of whom earlier that morning Matilda had spoken.

The white "Meester," George Howell Caldwell, was the manager of the big foreign-owned sugar estate, the Estrella in the hot country just below Magdalena.

Caldwell, in a brown corduroy riding habit, brightly polished boots and a sun helmet, a favorite contraption of foreigners, had a ruddy if tanned complexion that made him look like a perambulating sun, an impression of youth and square grimness. His cold blue boring eyes were those of a man accustomed to command.

His beautiful horse, completely coal black, save for one white stocking, arched his neck and cavorted.

The girl beside him, though just a child, only fourteen, was

already rounded and had a womanly supercilious air. Her petulant doll-like face was plump, incredibly soft, of a strange yellow-gold complexion—a refulgence seemed to seep into her sparkling black eyes, making them golden also; and her flashing yellow silk dress gave still more glow to her golden skin. About her neck she wore a chain of heavy gold-leaf plaques; on her wrist clanked heavy gold bracelets.

Snake-like she slid off her horse. One had the impression of something lovely and dangerous. Her black eyes threw off sparks, and her mouth, half parted, showed her cat-like white teeth. She radiated animal beauty and sex.

There were meaningful whispers among the group. Rufo hailed the newcomers jovially and ordered a peon to take their horses. He offered them a drink from the tequila bottle.

Caldwell barely touched it to his lips. But Pepita took a big, gurgling drink of the fiery stuff, gave a little shudder, smacked her lips and glanced around triumphantly.

She edged up to Luis and lifted one breast suggestively. "It's quite a fiesta."

Despondent over his failure to make any impression on Rufo about José, he said, "Yes," indifferently and walked toward the ramada.

She set her lips angrily.

A big crowd of peons dragged forth a barbecued pig.

The ramada music ceased. The dancers came running, sporting. A big rabble crowded around the pig. They tore off chunks of meat, ripped out the heart and liver, then struggled to free spots to eat. They scooped up large jars of frothing white pulque from a big vat and guzzled noisily. Shouts, laughter, much jostling, song, love-making, coarse language.

Pepe's corn and flower cross loomed above the disorderly crowd. Pepe, heedless of the pandemonium, was kneeling before it with a candle.

María Teresa and Arnulfo, caught up in the swirl, were separated. A half-drunk peon caught her sleeve, laid a hand boldly on her breast, pulled her to one side.

Silently she followed him around the side of the chapel.

He made love to her, lifted her skirt.

She giggled.

After kissing, arms about each other, they ate their chunks of meat greedily, the brown sauce smearing their faces. Her big,

greasy, puffy lipped mouth smacked the savory meat, and between bites she smacked at her unknown lover.

The judge staggered past. "My goodness, María Teresa, I thought you were on a vacation."

She laughed. "I am."

The judge gave his thigh a mighty wallop. "Your knife has a sharp edge."

He went away shaking with drunken laughter.

Arnulfo and Gerónimo, another peon, eddied out near one of the corrals.

Gerónimo, a funny looking Indian in a bright red shirt and a leather apron, embroidered with bright wool designs—he was a blacksmith—had a very tall, peaked head and bulbous red nose. Through a jagged rent in his sombrero poked out a tuft of coal black hair.

He touched his hat solemnly and held up a cigarette. "Good morning, friend Arnulfo. A fine fiesta. May I beg you for a light?"

They walked familiarly toward the Huitrón hut.

Gerónimo looked around cautiously. "They say José's ran off to join Pancho Madero."

"So I hear." Arnulfo drew down his lips, exposing two gold teeth. "Better than being flogged by Rufo."

Gerónimo hesitated. "Can—can you keep a secret? I'm going, too."

"But why?" Arnulfo's eyes opened wide. "You never get flogged."

Gerónimo smiled mysteriously. "Not that. I've a profitable business in mind. How much would all the gold from all the teeth of all the corpses of a nice big cemetery be worth?"

For the moment Arnulfo thought Gerónimo was making a joke about his own gold front teeth, but his friend seemed serious. He scratched his head.

"*Caramba!* Enough to buy an hacienda, I guess, or maybe a pig or a goat. But who'n 'ell is gonna dig 'em up?"

"No ghosts for me!" Gerónimo rubbed his red nose. "I was thinking of a nice battlefield before the bodies are buried."

Arnulfo jumped, then his clownish expression returned. "Hm! A general ought to have lots of gold in his teeth. But generals don't get shot."

Gerónimo grinned. "It ought to be a fairish business—getting gold out of dead men's teeth. Anyway, I'm going."

Thinking of his own gold teeth, Arnulfo was not so keen on the idea.

"Not so bad for the crows either, brother Gerónimo—a nice good battlefield of intestines. Watch out for those crows, brother." He laughed at his own wit.

He scratched his head again. "I had thought of going, too—when I had only one fat wife. Now that I've got little Lolita, I'll stick around this charming Hacienda Magdalena." He winked. "María Teresa's a better gold digger than you'll ever be."

They found themselves before the cross. Pepe was babbling piously. "Why do I get drunk? Why do I curse my good wife? Why do I beat her? I, a man with gray hairs, the father of a family, the head of a house. I betray my master, the Lord Jesus." A mystical look suffused his face.

"Poor old duffer," murmured Gerónimo.

Pepe shook his gray hairs dolefully and lifted his damp eyes Heavenward: "When the cock crows, thou shalt betray me. Oh, God!"

There was a burst of music from the ramada. Dresses flashed in the clear afternoon sunlight.

Grandmother came up behind Pepe.

He failed to notice her and kept on. "When the cock crows, thou shalt betray me. When —"

Grandmother upbraided him.

Pepe turned about, furious. "What are you gabbing about, she-mule? Even when a man tries to do right."

"*Ay de mí!*" she responded. "Drunk again. *Ay de mí!*"

"Not a drop, I swear—" He put his hands up in holy protest.

But she would not listen. "Drunk again! And in broad daylight! In front of everybody." She tried to pull him to the hut.

They went off, scolding at each other.

The crowd milled about the barbecue and the pulque vat. The music struck up louder from the ramada.

Apparently out of nowhere, Bobo, the village dwarf, pushed through the throng and seized a half-denuded leg bone from the stripped pig. He gnawed at it greedily with protruding teeth. His black, tangled hair hung into his beady eyes.

The crowd, bellies full, now half drunk, eddied about him, baiting him, twitting him, pushing him to and fro.

A peon gave him a hearty shove. "Bobo, why do you eat?" His eyes stared vacantly, yet cunningly. "Because I'm hungry." The crowd roared.

Another peon shoved him. "Bobo, why do you drink?"

Pretending, still more vacantly, he replied: "Because I'm thirsty." Another roar.

Again Bobo was shoved. "Why do you lie in the hay with Chata, the goat-herder's daughter?"

"Because I'm sleepy."

The crowd roared more than ever.

"He looks just like the stone idol in the Big House," shouted another peon.

Derisively and roughly, they shoved Bobo to and fro, yelling "Huitzilopochtli—Huitzilopochtli —"

María Teresa burst through the throng and defiantly curved her fingers at all his tormenters. "He *is* Huitzilopochtli, the great stone idol that walks in the night."

The crowd shrank back from her glaring eyes.

Bobo, eyes glittering, pointed solemnly with his big bone. "Smoke and fire, smoke and fire from the North!"

A loud voice roared "Viva Madero! Viva Pancho Madero!"

The crowd began yelling itself hoarse.

A few, frightened at such audacity, slunk away.

Bobo laid about him, striking right and left with his bone, shouting: "Huitzilopochtli, Huitzilopochtli, smoke and fire!"

Rufo dashed in like a mad bull, waving his gorilla arms. "Who shouted 'Viva Madero'? Who shouted for that bandit?"

The peons cringed. No one answered.

"Too cowardly to speak up, eh? I have a notion to send you to your huts or give you all good floggings. *Carajo!* What a flea-bitten bunch!" He turned away, then came back. "Any one know anything about José Huitrón? If ever I get my two hands on him."

He stalked off, muttering, swinging his long, hairy arms.

VII

Esperanza and Luis were dancing with the others under the ramada. The Indian girls were happy and damp from their exertions, their faces flushed, their carefully combed and greased hair, limp. Too plump, clumsy peasant folk, only too soon would their velvety brown skins grow wrinkled with toil.

Esperanza's good looks were challenged only when Caldwell came up with Pepita. There was an immediate interchange of hostility.

Pepita, scornfully mannered in her dancing, held her yellow skirt out affectedly. Flirtatious, she regretted that there was no one present worthy of her attention, though she did again cast Luis several melting glances.

He found himself watching her, his face slightly flushed.

Caldwell joined in in a jolly fashion; but his jollity seemed artificial, for the native Mexican, with none of the Spanish sparkle, rarely shows his emotions facially—a deep even-flowing sensualism, almost Oriental, binds him. The Indians remained masklike, but Caldwell laughed and kicked up his heels and thereby seemed actually stiff and out of place, less mature than his companion, the child-woman, Pepita, who looked voluptuous and sleek.

Caldwell had come down from the States over a year ago to manage the big Estrella hacienda. Shortly after, Joaquín de la Selva, the owner of Magdalena, had given him a dance of welcome at the Big House—all the rich owners about had come with their wives and daughters bedecked like Sheba queens. Esperanza and grandmother, with other peons, had stood looking open-mouthed through the barred windows at the finely dressed folk.

Though Caldwell had a wife and child in the States, it was supposed at the time that he was single, and many a dark-eyed señorita was hopeful. There were some beauties—the two Villacampa girls and Joaquín's niece, Marta Sandoval, quite bowled the "Gringo" over. But Marta went back to Mexico City. Caldwell paid enough visits to the Villacampa estate to cause people to lay wagers as to which of the two beautiful sisters he would select.

But the Estrella estate had an Asturian majordomo, who had other ideas for the new white foreign manager. Esperanza had seen and disliked the Asturian. A hard, aggressive fellow, out for his economic security, he constantly had thrust Pepita, his eldest daughter, though she was head over heels in love with one of the foremen, into Caldwell's company.

Soon news was flying from one estate to another that Pepita had moved up to the Big House of Estrella, with its broad, screened in veranda. From then on the tall, dark, frizzy-haired housekeeper, Josefina, had to take orders from this chit of a girl, who in soft lingerie and ever more jewelry, with ever-increasing

petulance, lolled around the porch, drinking ices, but more often whiskey or cognac. The better families at once gave Caldwell the cold shoulder.

Mostly the Indians accepted free matrimonial relations complacently, for few had money to pay the priest for a marriage ceremony. But white folk were different, and soon there were many sly fantastic stories about Pepita.

Four months after she became Caldwell's mistress, her grandmother had come up on a visit from the Vera Cruz hot country. Obviously she was a mulatto. The aristocratic families smiled acidly, for Pepita was known to be pregnant—a nice thing for Caldwell, an American, to have a black baby by a mistress living right in his own house. The Villacampa girls, once so hopeful, now told, with pursed lips, how fortunate it was they had found out all about Caldwell in time. But despite Pepita's supposed tar brush and the gossip, Caldwell seemed more in love with her than ever—and the baby, a girl, turned out to be white as milk.

Now, the dancing under the ramada kept on and on.

Don Toño, cousin of Joaquín, rode up on a handsome black horse with a white star nose and nervous white stocking feet, the saddle and handsome bridle, silver-studded.

Pepita lifted up her head. Her nostrils dilated. Toño's dashing air quickened something in her.

He was gaily dressed in a leather jacket, embroidered with silver braid, and in tight-fitting leather trousers, plated down the side with silver buttons. His enormous black felt sombrero was weighted down with silver spangles. A pearl-handled Toledo revolver poked from a carved leather holster. Though such a debonair figure, his face and smile were infantile, his skin soft, his cheeks fat—he looked as though constantly trying to blow a soap bubble.

He swung off his horse with a click of big-rowled Querétaro spurs.

"*Carajo!* Don Toño!" the judge greeted him. "Here's your friend, María Teresa."

With Bobo, who was crooning unintelligibly, she was watching the dancing.

The judge surveyed Toño's resplendent attire. "A whole new outfit," he said maliciously. "And have the warts come back?" Everyone laughed.

"Only the corn on my little toe, Judge," Toño replied, face-

tiously, and looked ruefully down at his tight shoes, then cast a flirtatious glance at Esperanza.

The music stopped. Pepita pulled Caldwell forward.

"What's all this about warts?" demanded the sheriff.

The judge heralded the news. Toño, to get rid of warts on his hands, had gone to see María Teresa in the Santiago cave. She said she could cure him if he would get nearer to God. To do that, he had to give her all his finery, his gaudy charro suit. "She stripped him then and there," said the judge. "She found he had a red undershirt. 'Christ never wore a red undershirt.' She made him take that off, too. Poor Toño toddled into my place after dark to beg me for a shirt to go home in."

Everyone laughed and Pepita, slightly drunk, the loudest. Caldwell thought it very droll.

"Laugh, chumps," said Toño gaily, in a powdered-glass voice. "But look at my hands—not a wart!" He liked to be the center of attention.

María Teresa came forward, her long calico dress scraping the ground. "Yes, I cured his warts." She addressed Toño. "But I didn't cure the warts on your heart. You never came again."

The judge roared. "Ho, the wench is making love to you, Toño. Haven't you another undershirt?"

The sheriff joined in the laughter. "It'll take a younger woman than María Teresa to cure the warts on Don Toño's heart."

María Teresa glared at him from under her tangle of witch-like hair. "Don't scoff, fool!" she said sharply. "Remember the idol in the Big House. Fire will sweep over a palace, and an old man who thought himself king will die. Many of you here will die in the whirlwind and the flame."

Toño shivered superstitiously. "María Teresa is wise. You'd do well to listen to her. Trouble is coming."

"Yes, we heard that once she married Huitzilopochtli, the big idol to a calf." He sneered, pointing toward Bobo, the dwarf.

Bobo, braiding straw in his hands, paid no attention.

"Sons without fathers!" cried the judge. "God, I'm dry."

A bottle was passed from hand to hand.

Pepita took another healthy drink. Her plump body quivered.

In the background the peons surged about, ever drunker and wilder. Occasionally a knife fight started. Two drunken women, jealous over some man, scratched and tore at each other.

A crowd formed. The two women were encouraged with shouts and vulgar talk.

One of the women finally ripped the blouse right off the other, who stood panting, sobbing with anger, the blood from her scratched face dripping down.

The other woman started toward her again, but Toño stepped in and shoved her aside.

The one with the exposed torso got her breath back and screamed drunken filth. Suddenly her jaw dropped.

For Don Joaquín, who didn't like the peons to fight, stood sternly in front of her.

The two women slunk away in silence.

The judge spoke deferentially. "This is a great fiesta, Don Joaquín." He removed his hat. "We are all grateful to you."

"Too many goddamn fiestas," snarled Joaquín. "Not enough work."

"Entirely too many," echoed the judge obsequiously. "People ought to work more."

"But fiestas keep them contented."

"Yes, that's one good thing about them," echoed the judge.

"Any peons in jail now?"

"Not one."

"Hm, an unusual fiesta."

"We almost arrested old Pepe, drunk last night."

Don Joaquín scowled. "That Huitrón bunch is a bad family. We're on the trail of his grandson now. A bad family."

"A very bad family," echoed the judge, scraping and bowing so that he endangered the loose buttons of his fancy vest.

When he straightened up, Don Joaquín had moved on.

Toño seated himself on an inverted oil tin and stroked Luis' guitar. He thrummed the jarabe dance tune. The group called for Luis and Esperanza. They were pulled forward, laughing and protesting.

Toño threw down his gorgeous black and silver sombrero for the occasion, and Esperanza and Luis danced the quick step around the brim. Faster and faster thrummed Toño. Faster and faster went the dance, up to the violent quick steps of the ending. Esperanza finished up erect and proud with a swirl of skirts, head thrown back triumphantly.

Cheers and handclapping.

Two people were watching her intently: Pepita, her eyes

glazed with drink, was furious that any other woman should hold the center of the stage. Joaquín watched with cold, lustful eyes. Esperanza had a figure and she had verve.

Esperanza caught his glance. Fear stiffened her body.

Joaquín continued to stare.

Luis trembled violently, the blood hot in his face.

But just then Caldwell and Pepita spoke to Joaquín to bid him good-bye.

Pepita gave Joaquín a saucy leer as she shook hands, then let her eyes half close with a deep breath and rise and fall of her globe-like breasts.

Joaquín stood looking after the pair, hands in his pockets, feet apart, a sneering smile on his face.

Pepita looked back and stuck out her tongue at him.

She and Caldwell clattered off on their horses.

The dancing under the ramada was resumed.

Presently the long tat-a-tat-tat of snare drums sounded.

"The Rurales," cried the crowd in fright.

The Rurales, who shot first and inquired afterwards, the terror force of the Díaz tyranny, could do anything to anybody. Three years before, they had swept into the mountain village of Huitzopec and, suspecting the peasants of befriending bandits, shot every tenth man, then threatened to come back and shoot every fifth man.

Now, a gray-uniformed squad under large felt sombreros, guns slung across their backs, they trotted in, an arrogant outfit, indifferent to the crowd which hated them.

A gasp of dismay went up from the peons. Running behind them, a noose around his neck, was José. He had to run with the horses, whatever their pace. If he lagged or fell, he would be choked to death, his neck broken.

Rurales clattered to a halt. José twisted at the cords on his wrist, his face writhing, lips ashen.

Rufo smashed his way forward. "So, you got the *cabrón!*" he shouted.

He put his two big hairy hands on José's helpless neck and shook him like a rat. "You fool of fools! Here, grab hold of him. Strip him."

Two peons jumped forward to obey. The rest crowded closer. The couples from the dance ramada, even the musicians, came running over.

Joaquín came up, greeted the officer, then walked off with a little frown, to watch the scene from the chapel steps.

José's shirt was stripped from his back, his hands tied above his head to two posts.

Rufo uncoiled a blacksnake whip, gave it several trial snaps. "I'll let him have it myself, this time."

The crowd watched him, like birds fascinated by a serpent.

Rufo hunched his shoulders, let the heavy lash fly. It cracked on José's back.

Rufo enjoyed the sensation—the free movement of his arm, the sting of the lash, the thud of it on soft human flesh.

The brown, sinewy back of José hung there in a curved bow, which swayed between his tied hands and his toes planted stiffly in the dust.

Rufo moistened his thick lips pleasurably, and paused, better to enjoy the sensation and heighten the drama for those about.

His thoughts hurried back over his own life, to the day when he himself had been tied thus to a post. But he had had the strength and courage to break away and inflict vengeance. If you were weak and stupid, you paid. If José had not been stupid, he would not have been caught. Pity did not enter. Strength was to be used. Again he let the lash fall.

But his thoughts still toyed with his own harsh experiences—his four years as an outlaw—free, dare-devil years, his name heralded with baited breath far and wide.

Afterwards he drifted into the hill-tilted mining town of Pachuca, at the height of the boom. For a while tended bar in a cheap dance cantina, the "Aurora," where he was useful as a fearless bouncer and where he learned all the intricacies of sophisticated vice from Magda, one of the saloon girls.

As a vaquero on a big northern hacienda that specialized in raising bulls for the ring, he had learned bull-fighting and took part in amateur fights.

Bored with the dry dusty plains, he went south again.

Magda, still working at the "Aurora" now scorned him. One night in a drunken frenzy, he yanked her out of a booth, slugged down her companion, ripped her clothes off and made her dance to the tune of bullets.

He backed out of the place, his gun still smoking, stole a horse and galloped over the mountains, coming out at Magdalena, where he got a job as teamster.

Being strong, steady and intelligent, he soon won the confidence of Joaquín's father, who made him a petty straw boss.

For two years, now, he had been majordomo. His youthful resentment against the system was entirely gone; he had mastered the system. Now he did the lashing.

José rocked between the posts. Rufo toyed with his whip, testing it, watching the graceful glide of it.

He spoke bantering words to a peon, then let the lash fly with deadly accuracy on José's back—once, twice, three times.

Esperanza gave a choked scream and sank on her knees.

"Shut up, she-devil!" Rufo let the lash shoot in her direction.

Grandmother hobbled up unsteadily. Luis caught her in his arms.

Rufo warmed to his task, enjoying the ripple of his own muscles along shoulder and arm. With a sickening thud the lash continued to fall.

The blows left great welts. Then they sliced the flesh, until José's whole back was a mass of pulp and blood. He fainted.

Esperanza caught Luis by the arm. "Oh, Luis! For the love of God! It can't go on. I'll throw myself in front of it."

Many peasants, accustomed to slavery, looked upon the scene apathetically. Whatever the boss did, however cruel, was right. But many breathed heavily. With characteristic veiling of their black eyes, they concealed the deep hate and rebellion in their hearts. For a new spirit was abroad. The hour of revolt was striking all over Mexico. "Madero!" The name was magical—wine in the veins—written like hope in the very clouds. But now, as though the old ways had to continue forever, the lash was falling on José's broken back.

Luis' blood was boiling. He couldn't stand José's suffering; even less, the tears of Esperanza and her grandmother. He started forward.

"No! No! Luis!" Esperanza tried to hold him back.

He shook her loose and jumped over to Rufo's side. "That's enough, Rufo. Have a heart."

Rufo let out a roar. With even more force he drove the lash at José.

A red mist came before Luis' eyes. He rushed in and caught Rufo's hand before the lash could fall again.

Rufo, taken by surprise, almost lost his grip on it. He lowered a shoulder and butted Luis off his feet.

Stepping back, Rufo let him have the lash. "All right! You asked for it. Take it then," he snarled.

Esperanza screamed.

Don Joaquín had descended from the chapel. In a quiet voice, he said to Rufo: "I think that will be enough."

With the back of his hand, Rufo rubbed the sweat from his blood-shot eyes. "They ought to be made into crow's meat, both of them." With a gloating look, he coiled up his bloody lash, wiped the end with his hand, and transferred the blood in swipes to his own trousers.

Luis' groaned and struggled up. The lash had caught him once in the kidneys, then had slashed his neck and chin.

Esperanza rushed over to him, put her arm about him.

Joaquín turned sternly to the officer of the Rurales. "Take both these men off to the army. Tell your commandant they'll make good cannon fodder for the campaign against Madero."

José's body was thrown across a horse. Luis was tied up and flung into a saddle.

Esperanza fought frantically to get to the two prisoners, but the soldiers pushed her back roughly.

As they rode off, Luis glanced back at her. In his face was scorn for his persecutors, angry pride for himself, and love for her.

Esperanza, desperate, with a cry, flung herself at Joaquín's feet.

"Don Joaquín, in the name of your own mother who loved me, in the name of the Holy Virgin, have mercy. Let Don Luis go free. He only tried to save José because he's my brother. I made him do it."

Joaquín looked at her coldly. "Stop that weeping and stand up."

She rose unsteadily, still shaking with sobs.

He lifted her chin brusquely. "We saw each other yesterday afternoon. You're the best looking girl on the place."

In his eyes, she saw only hard flame and lust and faint amusement.

He continued meaningfully. "Nothing serious will happen to them except a little honest soldiering. Luis might even come back sooner, if—if you are the right sort of girl with me."

His words went through her veins like slow-moving ice.

He contemplated her. Usually the cow-like peasant women just

accepted their fate like animals. To lie with them left a taste of frustration and disgust. But now and then one not a virgin was lewd enough to get and give a thrill. Only occasionally was he thrilled by one with enough spunk to fight and scratch. Apparently this girl was like that.

He called to Rufo. "See that this girl is at the house not later than ten o'clock. Don't bring her into the party—we'll be playing cards in the dining-room—but into the big salón. Understand?"

"Certainly, sir." Rufo leered at Esperanza.

Again Joaquín looked at her through smiling, half-closed eyes; the lids were white with delicate but prominent blue veins.

"You're a pretty girl, too pretty for that romantic fool, Luis." He patted her cheek and turned away.

Esperanza put her hand to the place he had touched. It burned, almost as though a powerful acid were eating into her flesh.

Grandmother stumbled over to her. The two women fell into each other's arms, sobbing.

Bobo hovered curious about them, contracting his fingers, muttering.

The music struck up again under the ramada. A cloud of rockets burst over the chapel.

The two women stumbled home to their hut. There they sank down on their knees before the crucifix and the little red float lamp.

Esperanza jumped up and feverishly began tying things up in a little bundle. "I'm going away, Abuelita."

"What will happen to us all? Where will you go, my child?"

"Tonight I can stay at Pablo's on Rosales."

Pepe came in, his white hair all awry.

Esperanza sobbed in his arms.

He stroked her head. "My poor, little pigeon."

Guadalupe and Matilda came running in. They chattered wildly at one and the same time.

Guadalupe ran off to tell her parents.

"You are all I have now, besides Pepe," blubbered grandmother to Esperanza. "You will take care of yourself, my lovely child."

Guadalupe came back panting. "I've told father. They'll be along later."

The three girls slipped out of the hut.

There, on the stone in front, sat Chato, one of the toughest hacienda guards, his rifle across his knees.

"Get back—get back!" he growled at Esperanza.

VIII

The Hacienda Magdalena, estimated at 250,000 acres, stretched from rich valley lands in a vast circle between low hills far up the slopes of the volcanoes and contained half a dozen good-sized villages still retaining slightly communal features. The nearest, Milpa Verde, counted nearly 600 families. In good years the hacienda produced a net income of over 150,000 pesos, equivalent to a return on a capital of nearly two million.

Originally a grant to an early Conquistador by the King of Spain, it was now entirely owned by a descendant, Don Joaquín de la Selva.

Joaquín had had the benefit of Germany's best training. He had gone there a slender but strong youngster, sensitive and well-bred. With delicate features and long eye-lashes, almost like a girl's, having a touchy vanity and being a dreamer, always writing verse and loving music and art, he did not fit in well with rough and tumble university life, though he was in no way effeminate.

Challenged to a sabre duel, he countered with a demand for pistols; rank heresy, which showed the students he was just a coward who couldn't stand up to cold steel. Sly remarks were passed about the Mexican pansy.

Isolated, he went his way with fierce unhappy pride, and there grew up in him a brutal sadism, which was to express itself years later and make him a strong, wilful, but psychologically complicated character.

This sadistic note, after he returned to Magdalena, a severe, thin-lipped, disciplined person, found full play in his harsh treatment of underlings. His parents, who had died a few years ago, had always been kind to peons in distress, but Joaquín kept them sternly in their places, never encouraging even the brighter ones to become anything. He punished ruthlessly.

Five years ago he had married into the wealthy Azcárate family—a twenty-two year bride of unusual beauty. But already pregnant with her fourth baby, her freshness had faded quickly into a selfish, obstinate neurasthenia. She rarely visited the

hacienda. Joaquín preferred to live a bachelor life there and usually had other female attractions at hand.

Since taking full charge of the estate he had made some improvements. He laid the narrow tracks for jerk cars and had enlarged and beautified the Big House. He had built a swimming pool, billiard hall, tennis courts and shooting range. But the main salón still retained its medieval glories, tall windows hung with heavy blood-red fringed curtains and tasseled cords. Huge unframed mirrors with golden winged dragons writhing over the beveled edges dated back to the seventeenth century. Glass cabinets were cluttered with historic nicknacks, ivory from the Orient, gold, silver and cut-glass objects. The high gold-back chairs and settees, with yellow satin upholstery, stood stiffly about gold and marble inlaid tables. Joaquín's only innovations were to hang well-selected oil paintings and to make a Moorish nook with canopy and Ottoman curtains—a wide, low divan between the two main windows on the long side. To the left stood the massive stone idol of Huitzilopochtli, a grotesque, distorted monster carved with birds, serpents and hieroglyphics. In one corner was a medieval coat of mail; in another, a tall horologe.

Frosted, flower-patterned doors led into the dining-room, luxuriously appointed with long wooden panels and blue Talavera tiles. On state occasions the cut-glass and silver services made a dazzling ensemble.

In this dining-room, the evening of the fiesta, Joaquín and his male friends sat around the table littered with bottles. The little group was shouting, laughing and cursing. Joaquín had recently come back from a trip abroad. This party was in the nature of a welcome.

The salón itself was deserted and dark, save for the dim light that sifted through the frosted glass doors.

The horologe in the corner chimed ten in slow strokes. Rufo appeared, pushing Esperanza ahead of him.

She broke loose and tried to run out.

Seizing her, he shoved her ahead violently. "Get in there, you little bitch, and stay until you're wanted." He gurgled a laugh deep in his throat as she struggled again. "Take it easy, little spit-fire."

He went out. The lock clicked.

Terrified, heart pounding, Esperanza shrank on the divan, then

started violently when she saw the coat of mail. In the semi-darkness the stone idol was gruesome.

Beyond the frosted doors of the dining-room the sounds of carousal ceased. Chairs scraped on the tiles. Silhouettes rose from their places.

Esperanza darted behind one of the heavy red curtains.

The frosted doors opened. A broad gleam of light was thrown across the tiles.

Don Joaquín entered with Toño and Don Diego. The last was the owner of the neighboring Rosales hacienda, a middle-aged energetic man with a blunt nose and a lean face, so deep-lined from eyes to below the mouth that at first one thought the grooves were sabre scars. Around his eyes rayed out deep crow's-feet, giving him a cunning, experienced look. Actually he was a dull, naïve person, whose wealth gave him an air of importance beyond his capacities.

All three sipped their glasses of tequila as they talked.

"I don't half like the looks of this revolt in the north," Don Joaquín was saying.

Diego, with a grave, self-assured gesture, smiled knowingly. "Nothing to worry about. This fool Madero is just an idiotic visionary. Good Don Porfirio still has an iron hand."

"The old man is getting on in years. A lot of trouble is brewing. Fires spread. I'm really worried. There's something different abroad in the country now."

Toño spoke up huskily. "There's something in the very air. It's uncanny, like some unseen shadow."

Diego growled at him. "You're just a superstitious idiot."

Toño quivered. "I'm not the only one. Today at the fiesta, María Teresa said something about smoke and fire in the north. You should have heard the peons shout 'Viva Madero!' until Rufo quieted them. She's positively uncanny."

Joaquín threw away his cigarette and stepped on it. "Maybe we ought to run her out of here. Lord, you'd think the French revolution had resurrected. We've got to get ready to fight. How many guns have you got on your place, Diego?"

Diego shrugged. "About thirty rifles."

Joaquín nodded. "I have two hundred here, with plenty of ammunition. You ought to get in a supply right away."

Toño spoke up. "There's that fellow in the south, too. Emili-

ano Zapata. He's burning haciendas right and left. He'd string us all up in a jiffy."

Joaquín barked angrily. "The beggars will merely starve the quicker later on. They won't find us sleeping here, though."

Diego's glance fell on some oils on the wall. "These are new, are they not?" His voice took on the castor-oil quality of a person who admires art because it's the thing to admire art.

Joaquín waved his hand deprecatingly. "A few canvasses I picked up in Paris." He switched on the light.

Diego examined them. "That landscape is nice, also that harbor scene. You are a versatile sort, Joaquín."

Joaquín was flattered. "This Poussin is rather good, though the green doesn't show up well in artificial light. But I like that crumbling wall—*pathetic*, eh?"

"And this?"

Joaquín swelled with pride. "A real Canaletto. Venice is a hobby of mine. Such beautiful street-walkers in Venice."

"Ha, ha," laughed Diego. "What do they wear, bathing suits?"

Toño declared that the only painter of any importance who had ever lived was El Greco, the mystic.

Joaquín drew down his mouth. "I'll take my lush Venetians any time. I'm no long-faced æsthetic. I like color, texture, flesh." They moved on. "Now this copy of Ingres, *Le Source*, that's the sort of thing I like."

"Exquisite!" Diego examined the virginal nude figure.

Joaquín was pleased. He believed he had matchless taste.

Diego gave him a sly look, tongue in cheek. "I hear that besides the paintings you brought back something magical in the flesh. The country maids of 'the ranch where I was born' aren't quite enough, eh?"

"I intended to produce her tonight for your combined edification. But she has whims. She's more insufferable than a wife."

Joaquín recalled Esperanza and glanced up and down the salón. He detected the slight movement of the red curtains and smiled.

He resumed about his new mistress. "We met in Paris—Henriette Cheval is her name—one of those white, long-necked, slanting shoulder types—lily effect, deliberate and disdainful, keeps you constantly angered, ready to kick her out—only one never does.

"Early this morning she refused to have anything to do with

the fiesta, so she took her maid Sasha over to the chapel and has been praying all day—bad as that old Pepe. Well, I'll be—here she comes now!"

Henriette's extravagantly low cut gold gown cleaved like onion skin to her magnificent tall figure. Her small, soft mouth glowed brightly red and moist and puckery in her milk-white face. Her brows, arched high above her big olive-gray eyes, seemed painted on a porcelain mask by an oriental brush—the inexpressive face of an intelligent doll, with tiny round, almost lobeless ears. She had the lurking cunning and the perverted suggestiveness of women too perfect and too well cared for.

Diego gave a low whistle. "Exquisite!" He smacked his lips.

Joaquín clamped his jaw. "She's too late."

Henriette curtsied disdainfully. "At your orders, sir." Her voice was languid.

Joaquín answered harshly. "So, you're over your silly tantrums."

Henriette pretended to pout. "And you fail properly to appreciate zee fact?"

She rubbed her white jeweled hands down his chest; her body arched like a kitten's. She purred: "You are just zee big baby."

Joaquín brushed her hands aside. "None of your soft tricks. I'm busy now, also later in the evening. I shall not be without due consolation."

Henriette was startled. "What do you mean, Joaquín? Do not be zee unreasonable person."

Joaquín was stubborn. "You have arrived too late. Go back and pray."

He assumed a gay tone. "Go pray to God for your everlasting soul. Tell Him that it is more important than an hour of pleasure. Pray that while you are worrying about your soul the banked fires of life do not fall lower. Pray that the lost sun of love will be compensated for in the long nights of eternity. Pray that as the days whirl by the flesh remain equally willing and desirable. Pray —"

The tip of Henriette's little tongue protruded from her puckery lips. "Joaquín, my darling, how eloquent! Tequila enhances your originality."

Secretly she was alarmed. "I'm coming with you tonight, Joaquín. It is for this I have dressed so carefully—for you."

She gave a half turn, displaying her naked back and her long slim lines. She put her arms about him.

"Surely you did not take me seriously. A little prayer," she said, rubbing against him suggestively, "especially in the daytime, ees not a bad thing."

Diego snickered.

Joaquín chuckled brutally. "Prayer polishes, eh, for later events."

Henriette sighed hopelessly. "You are so zee cynic. But do I not always give you zee joy such as no woman?"

Joaquín turned away. "My dear, you changed plans. So have I. But my mind is not so airy as yours. I don't change twice. I don't need you. Go back to your room."

Henriette shook the strap on her dress, her face blazing. Her whole body rippled, but her anger merged into a soft slyness. "Now do be zee reasonable person."

"The world was not made for you, my little Henriette"—he lit a cigarette flippantly, but with a flushed salacious expression—"nor did I contract fidelity."

Henriette's eyes blazed, but her disdainful smile remained on her lips and she merely swept her dress about contemptuously in a half circle and drew herself up haughtily with a gliding movement of her hand down breast and hips—she liked to act. "You have zee effrontery to tell me so—" Then, smiling coldly, she walked away.

Over her lifted marble-white shoulder, she said, "As you desire, my Sultan. I shall now begin praying also at night, and"—she laughed softly—"and mayhap not. The world, dear Joaquín, was as little made for you." She swept off with a rustle of silk.

Joaquín took nervous paces. "Damn her. She wanted to scratch my eyes out. But gad, that pose!"

Diego smacked his lips rapturously. "You do have marvelous taste, Don Joaquín."

"So far as the flesh is concerned, not in temperament. She's too damned whimsical. She even made me take the bars out of one of the end windows in the salón—hell of a business digging them out of the cement—said she had to have at least one window that didn't make her think she was in a prison. I had to have extra heavy beams made to brace the shutters at night. Probably she wanted the bars off for a lover." He laughed cynically.

Joaquín switched off the lights. They strolled back to the

dining-room, closed the frosted doors. The other guests came back from the billiard-room.

Esperanza crept out from behind the curtain. Once more she could hear the muffled laughter, the clink of glasses and poker chips, could see the silhouettes of the unknown actors.

She crumpled up in a little heap, sobbed, gradually fell into a stupor.

The frosted doors grew dim. Before her closed eyes passed the varied scenes of the day—ghostly figures . . . the insistent call of the hoot-owl . . . Pepe and the candle . . . Luis . . . the faint sounds of a guitar . . . the candle-lit altar of the chapel. Once more she was in the fiesta, but all was unreal—except Bobo; he was grimacing.

His face was actually hatcheted between the bars of an open window at the end of the salón.

He made signs to her.

She hurried over.

He writhed his fingers. "The next window has no bars. Unfasten the shutters and escape!"

"No bars!" she exclaimed.

"You can escape—whooeee into the night! You can be a witch and ride in the night in a black hood. Ride north, ride north, to the smoke and the blood. Ride north!"

His face disappeared . . . A long whoooooee sounded.

Esperanza worked frantically to unlatch the shutters he had indicated, but only tore her hands.

She sank down on the floor. Leaning her flushed face against the cold tile wall, she saw a thousand terrors. Again she drifted into a stupor. Through her brain came marching Rurales, a snare-drum, bugles. The Huitzilopichtli idol came to life wearing a Bobo face.

Esperanza shuddered, rubbed her eyes in fright. The Huitzilopichtli idol was still standing immobile in his corner.

Why hadn't she jumped out before them all when Henriette was there? It might have saved her? Now, she thought of the little door through which Henriette had come into the salón.

She tried it. It was locked.

She put her ear to it, but heard nothing, then hammered on it, half-frightened at the noise she made.

Only an empty echo. Evidently it opened on to some corridor.

She hammered again.

No one came.

She turned about. The idol and coat-of-mail were multiplied frighteningly in the big mirrors—an army of fantastic figures in a sort of Dantesque hell.

Again she sank down on the divan. Everything became a blur of strange thoughts once more . . . the stone idol . . . the coat of mail . . . the white volcanoes kissed by the pure sun . . . the story Luis had told her of the gods strewing flowers . . . Pepita dancing naked . . . marching Rurales, and once more the sound of snare drums and bugles . . . Again the cruel lashing of José . . . the Rurales marching off with him and Luis . . . the face of Bobo . . . Bobo waving the meat-bone . . . Everything faded.

Again she heard the running feet of José, running into the gully . . . grandmother . . . the hoot-owl . . . Pepe and the cross.

Outside in the patio, horses pawed the cement as the guests swung into their saddles and departed.

IX

Revolution had really come. The Madero movement had burst out like a flame everywhere. Peons had revolted. In Oaxaca, Yaqui Indians—brought as slaves from their far northern land and kept locked up nights after toil—broke loose and nailed the Spanish hacienda owner alive to his own house door. Bands were pillaging everywhere.

Yet during those four months subsequent to the Magdalena fiesta, things went on there much as before—for a time. In nearby Amecameca, the local dance saloon, *Vamos de Nuevo*, with its bright facade of bull-fight scenes, carried on business much as usual.

For such a small community, *Vamos de Nuevo* was well equipped—sawdust, spittoons, an imposing mirror sideboard in a carved grapevine frame, fronted with rows of glistening bottles. Frosted white globes were painted to represent masks. To the left, making an L, were stalls, labelled "Gabinetes," a scuffed player piano and a small door leading to toilets.

On the right wall was a dingy tapestry of the arch of Napoleon III in Milan; and above the player piano, a tapestry of Oriental bathing women, attended by black eunuchs.

This particular night, rain was dripping down the swinging

doors, shaken by occasional ghost-like gusts, and little puddles ran in on the tiled floor.

Don Manuel, the big-girthed Spanish bartender, leaned his knobby Gallego head, with close cropped hair and wide ears, over the end of the bar to talk to a friend sipping aguardiente.

It was early, not much business. At a rear table sat Arnulfo, Gerónimo—now dressed in a cheap store suit, with gaudy red flowing tie and new red sombrero—and two other peons. Arnulfo and one of the others were playing armadillo guitars.

At the other tables lounged Indian bar-maids in gay heavily beaded rayon dresses. High glass inset combs glistened in their black hair; large barbaric earrings glistened in their ears. Their short dresses exposed smooth brown skin above gaudy bow garters, clockwork stockings and high-heeled shoes.

This evening, despite the vulgar chatter and raucous laughter of the girls, the bar had a hushed, lost-world note. The gloomy, chill rain meant poor business.

Barmaid Elena shivered and drew her black silk tápalo about her naked brown shoulders, so heavily powdered they had taken on a purplish tint.

"Ugh! What a devil of a night! The witches are riding tonight. Remember that María Teresa?"

Her companion, Concha, a tall girl with prominent collar bones and knife-like shoulders slicing out of a green spangled dress, shook back her mop of thick black curls and moved her large vague mouth.

"God pity any one out in this *chingado* storm!"

Elena adjusted her red earrings. "There was a ragged beggar lying by the postoffice. I gave the poor bastard a copper. But he'll be dead by morning."

Concha yawned and stretched herself. Her dress pulled tight across her bulging breasts, enormous for her slender bony body. Speculatively she stared at the table of the four peons. Her high pencilled eyebrows lifted in disgust.

"Except when the officers are in town, this joint is like a *chingado* coffin; nobody has anything."

Elena shrugged. Her tápalo slipped down over one arm.

"We should worry. We're lucky to have a roof to keep us dry."

Concha droned on wearily. "The huts in the lower part of this *chingado* village are flooded. This afternoon—*que hijos de la*

chingado—I saw two babies sitting in the water on the mud floor. We're lucky enough."

"Lucky enough," echoed Elena.

"If there were only a little business!" yawned Concha. She pulled at a chain about her neck, revealing a silver medallion, and crossed herself piously.

Gloria, a flamboyant buxom girl, with a Roman nose and ham-shaped lips, also produced the image of a saint. She laughed.

"I've my little Jerónimo to keep me from getting sick from the men; I've a little house on high ground. I've my mother and a bed for us both. I've a statue of Don Porfirio, who saves our country. And on the terrace, I've two turkey cocks, big fellows. What more do I need?"

She laughed heartily, good-naturedly, and clanked the bright bracelets on her fat wrist.

Elena replied glumly: "Yes, you are lucky."

"Still," considered Concha, "if only there were just a little more business."

Arnulfo and Gerónimo came over. Gerónimo touched Concha on her bare shoulder. "Here's business for you."

Concha sniffed and turned her shapely back. "*Carajo*. When the colonel was in here two nights ago, we had twelve bottles of beer and he gave me five pesos for the night."

Gerónimo jingled coins in his pockets. "I've money, too, even if I ain't got no uniform."

Gloria, at the sound of the money, grabbed his arm. "Come over here, Gerónimo, I like you."

Concha's eyes spit fire. "Don't go butting in, Gloria." She pulled Gerónimo down beside her. Arnulfo took the other chair.

Chin on her jeweled hand, eyes drawn to slits, Concha smiled maliciously and drawled. "How 'n hell did *you* ever get any money?"

Gerónimo smiled cockily. "I've more coin than I ever had. Bring on the drinks—for everybody!"

Elena took the orders.

Concha looked at Gerónimo calculatingly. "More coin than ever before? That's not saying a hell of a lot."

Gerónimo gave her a playful shove. "That's all you know about it, little snot. In these times—tra, la, la, la. Two months with the revolutionists, and with our foreman no less. He's a high mucky-muck now."

"Who?"

"Luis Cardona."

Concha's head bobbed excitedly. "Yes, he's over in Ozumba now. A real guy, they say."

Gloria broke in. "And where's Rufo, the Gorilla?"

"Who knows? He hasn't been heard of since the break-up." Swelling up proudly, Gerónimo continued with his own tale. "We sacked Tlaxcala and then beat it." He hummed contentedly, then leered at Arnulfo. "And no gold teeth and no crows either."

Arnulfo was rueful. "Wish I'd gone along. By the way, what happened to Bobo?"

"They caught him near Cholula." Gerónimo grinned. "Wandering over the battlefield. The story got around he was eating human flesh."

Concha let out a blood-curdling scream.

"Ugh! Ugh!" grunted Arnulfo. "What did they do to him?"

"Nothing. Drove him away. What can anyone do with Bobo? The soldiers wouldn't stand for his being punished. They say Huitzilopochtli would be angered. Best be safe."

Elena set the drinks out.

Arnulfo chuckled her in the ribs. "How's the apple sauce?"

She wriggled back, struck his hand. "Damn' sour for you."

Gerónimo lifted his glass, quirking his mouth sideways. "Let's drink. Well, I've some coin now, anyway."

Concha moved closer to him. They touched glasses. "I was just joking about the colonel, Gerónimo—love—" she drawled.

Gerónimo sneered. "A different story now, eh, little gold-digger."

Concha leaned back to tantalize him with the lines of her body. "I've got to live, don't I?"

"So do fleas." Gerónimo downed his drink at a swallow and put his hand on one of her breasts.

Concha slapped him, but at once cuddled up to him. "Don't get angry, Gerónimo, I'll treat you nice."

"Then you'll really be my girl?" demanded Gerónimo.

"Sure will." She caressed his cheek. The false glass stones in her rings glittered.

"And you won't ever look at any more of those officers?"

She continued to caress his cheek. "Only your girl, no one else's."

Arnulfo put his arm around Gloria, who at once lifted one of her fat legs and put it across his.

Grandiosely Gerónimo said to Concha. "Maybe I'll take you away from this dump, keep you by me. You're pretty."

She drawled, pursing her lips baby fashion. "I'll go with you."

Gerónimo, pleased, touched her glass. They drank. He sang, beating on the table with the flat of his hand.

'Twas in the plaza of Olinalá
Where the mangos are gold,
Where the mangos are grand,
'Twas a balcony in Olinalá—

When he stopped, dead silence enveloped the cantina. The voices, the laughter and sound of glasses ceased.

The storm whined outside. All listened intently.

The noise started up again. Elena went over to one of the front tables near the door.

Gerónimo and Concha drank some more and kissed each other. Concha held his mouth in her hand and made little smacking sounds.

Presently Gerónimo and Arnulfo took Concha and Gloria and two other girls back to their companions at the table near the stalls. They played and sang. When they stopped, Elena started the player piano. All four pairs danced the *danzón*, a slow voluptuous movement.

The swinging doors opened—slowly. A slight female figure, a *redozo* drawn close about her face, crept cautiously into the saloon. Behind her entered a flash of lightning and a long roll of thunder.

She was completely soaked. It was Esperanza.

Don Manuel, the bartender, rushed from behind the bar. Angrily he shouted, "*Putá!* Out with you. You can't come in here."

The bar-maids watched indifferently, all except Elena. "Don't put her out in this storm, Manuel."

"We can't have riff-raff in here."

Elena persisted. "I'll buy her a drink."

"Her! Sitting at the tables. It'd spoil business."

Esperanza collapsed on the floor near Elena's table. "I'll sit here quiet," she said in a weak voice.

"Make her a hot rum punch, Manuel," ordered Elena. She

threw the money on the bar and brought back the steaming glass to Esperanza. "Here, dearie, this'll warm you."

Esperanza sipped at it.

"Are you hungry, dearie? I'll buy you a taco." Elena brought back meat rolled in a tortilla. "Ain't you got no folks, dearie?"

Esperanza, still sitting on the floor, between hungry bites, told Elena her story.

X

After the night with Joaquín, Esperanza had returned to the hut to days of customary routine—early rising, grinding corn when there was any, the making of tortillas, cleaning, sweeping, the morning visit to the chapel where she wept alone, the eternal weaving of mats, then cold nights descending with smoky shadows into a blackness depressing and growing colder toward dawn.

The days had dragged by, clouded with the pain of José's and Luis' absence. Her youth seemed like a tiny bird she had once held in her hands; she could feel its frightened quivering, then with one shrill cry it had vanished forever. Everything lovely had suddenly flown out of her hands.

She was pregnant.

The old folks, no one, blamed her, and most peon girls patiently accepted the ill-fate that had been hers, some were even proud to have a child with blood they believed superior; if anything, a woman who had had a child, since there was then no question of fertility, was more marriageable. Women were good for two things, to bear children and to work. An Indian lover would look upon what had happened as an act of God, at least something to be suffered stoically.

But white folks and mixed bloods thought differently. Virginity for them was something very sacred, at least important.

And so she scarcely expected Luis to marry her now for what had happened would weigh in his thoughts bitterly all his days. For his sake, she was shamed, would never see him again, would go away.

But now, with unnecessary pride, Esperanza drove herself up the gray stone lanes almost in a spirit of defiance of the villagers and the world.

One day María Teresa made one of her cryptic remarks—

about "stone in the flesh." Esperanza asked her just what she meant. She said:

"You act like white folk, not like us. We Indians always embrace pain gladly until it melts into peace into our hearts."

But no pity could melt the hard stone lodged inside Esperanza.

The days plodded by. At the fall of night, raw thin light lay on the jagged nearby hills; the snow-line crept lower and lower on the volcanoes. Esperanza's urge to get away became overpowering.

Heretofore they had always sold their mats right on the hacienda to other Indians who could make the long trip to Mexico City. Esperanza now suggested, since all work on the hacienda had ceased and folk were starving, that she peddle the mats in Amecameca.

They had no burro. The roll of several dozen mats, strapped to her back by a broad band about her forehead, made a heavy burden, but what Indian is not accustomed to heavy burdens? Bent under the load, Esperanza dog-trotted the three hours distance through the maguey fields and pine woods to Amecameca. Vomiting frequently made her stop, panting and dizzy.

She took her place in the market in the space between the triple church arch and the main plaza. The first time she had ever been away from home except to Pablo's, she was lonely and wished she had brought her dog, Rey, along. There was a big conglomeration of venders, some with their wares spread on the ground, others in little stalls. A row of Indians squatted behind sacks of maize of many colors, heaps of pottery, vegetables, flowers, calicoes, percales, gingham puffed up in loose mountains of color, hand-painted fiber bags and rugs, shoes, sandals, little eating-booths from which came the pungent smell of pork-grease.

Dogs sniffed about for scraps. Pigs had to be kicked away.

The rain came in intermittent spurts as though some one were squeezing a sponge—wares were hastily moved to sheltered places, doorways, porticoes, or covered over with canvas. Anxiously the venders scrutinized the sky to see how long the shower would last; frequent appeals were made to Santa Catarina to spread her cape and catch the downpour.

It cleared just at sundown, leaving a pale green band above the mountain tops that shaded off into pale blue, turning darker. To the west the sky was aflame with every color from heliotrope

to blood-red, reflected in a play of pastel shades over the flanks of the snow-clad volcanoes.

The first day, Esperanza sold four mats for three times what they would have brought at home.

For supper, in a little terra-cotta jar, over one of the night bon-fires of the days rubbish of boxes and papers, she heated a gruel called *pinole*, of roasted corn, ground fine, then curled up on a mat, tired from her long hike and the day's excitement.

The sun was already up when she stirred. Framed in the triple church arch, the volcanoes rose up in all their majesty, seemingly so close in the rarified atmosphere one merely had to put out a hand to touch them. She heated more *pinole*, then squatted behind her wares hour after hour. There was much talk about the revolution. Her heart ached for Luis and José.

By eleven, she had sold four more mats at a slightly better price. Her last customer bought all the rest. Though a stately white woman, though well-dressed for Amecameca in black taffeta and a big much-decorated hat, nevertheless she bargained bitterly to the last centavo. She had a tight, selfish little mouth with a light fuzz on her upper lip, pudgy cheeks and a massive nose with large pores, despite much use of cosmetics.

"Carry the mats to my house," the woman ordered, a final insult.

But Esperanza, anxious to get rid of her wares, obeyed. Putting the long mats on her back, she followed the woman down a side street, along an adobe wall. They turned through an iron gate to a big green house with colored glass eyelets above doors and windows—an old-fashioned place, but one of the few good houses in Amecameca.

The woman reluctantly fished out the money from a large bag. With a sly look, she handed over five centavos less than she had promised.

Thoroughly exasperated, Esperanza handed back the money and started off with her mats.

The woman laughed and gave her the full amount. "You are a nice girl and very pretty for an Indian."

Esperanza wanted to say: "You are white and ugly and selfish besides," but such things were never said to the "people of reason," who were always "right"—that was the safe Indian rule.

"I need a servant," said the woman, "and I like you. Have you ever worked out?"

Esperanza did not like the elegant señora in the slightest, but her offer opened up a chance to escape from Magdalena and bitter memories. Luis would be saved the embarrassment of finding her there.

"I couldn't pay you very much—four pesos a month and keep." The señora pursed up her little lips. "I shall expect you to wear shoes."

This would take her first month's wage. But Esperanza accepted the job.

By a friend in the plaza, she sent the money from the mats to her grandmother.

Esperanza's employer, Señora Virginia Mora, kept her busy from dawn till late at night, scrubbing, washing clothes, cooking, even weeding in the garden.

But once the shoes quit pinching her feet, Esperanza, used to hard work, didn't mind very much, though she never got used to the woman's constant, shrill nagging. "You lazy slut! Why are you so dumb? What is the matter with your memory? Hopeless! Terrible! Preposterous!" The only compensation was that Señora Mora worked harder than Esperanza just in keeping after her.

There were brighter features. From the terraza where Esperanza spread out clothes, she could see the volcanoes and the Sacred Mount with its two chapels and little graveyard surrounding Guadalupe church, and whenever she went to market alone, she got a chance to chat with the plaza folk and slip into some little church to pray.

All the time, news of the revolution grew more exciting. Soon bands of rebels were reported in the foothills. They raided various villages.

The señora, alarmed, talked of leaving for Mexico City. Frantically worried about her fate and her properties if revolution burst, after three months she paid Esperanza only six instead of her wages of eight pesos.

Esperanza bought material for a new dress and sat up late at night sewing on it.

Soon federal troops poured into Amecameca. The barracks were full. Many were bivouacked in the plaza. Often drunk, they laid violent hands on any humble woman. Esperanza always sneaked down the back streets.

A battle was reported not far from Amecameca, heavy firing

could be heard. Esperanza was struck by the fact that the rebel leader was said to be named Cardona, the same as Luis.

The following morning the city swarmed with drunken victorious federals. Esperanza hated them like poison.

The alarmed señora set Esperanza to packing everything. The following morning she took the train for Mexico City without paying what she owed Esperanza.

That same afternoon it began to rain. About five, during a let up, Esperanza started for the hacienda. A little way out of town, she heard firing, then saw armed men. Looking back, she saw more troops.

She ducked down into a ditch and crept across a wet field, partly screened by trees.

There were bands of armed men everywhere. Valleywards, she saw a dozen buzzards circling darkly with beautiful patience. Buzzards—she thought of Bobo. She heard firing.

Near the railroad, she ducked into the bushes to avoid a large body of rebels.

They passed within fifty yards, had a dozen prisoners in their midst.

One was the white "Meester" Caldwell, manager of the Estrella hacienda. He rode straight ahead, face set.

Behind him was a middle-aged woman, a baby in her arms. Curious.

The rain ceased. That night Esperanza had to sleep, freezing cold, in the lee of a big rock.

In the morning she ran into a federal detachment. They had several dozen prisoners, ropes around their necks. They had been beaten over the head with quirts. The blood had caked on their shirts. A number could scarcely stand.

The officer warned her it was unsafe to go ahead.

She had to go back to Amecameca.

For twenty-four hours she had had nothing to eat. One of her market friends gave her a little food.

Again the rain started—before Esperanza had had a chance to get her clothes and soggy shoes dried out.

That afternoon all the federals marched hurriedly out of town; not a soldier was left in the place.

For three days it rained, and Esperanza slept in it in the plaza. The last evening, wet and bedraggled, she crept into the only place open, the *Vamos de Nuevo* saloon.

Now warmed by the punch and taco Elena had given her, she felt better.

Elena comforted her. "I wouldn't be a bit ashamed of having a baby, not even if I couldn't produce the father."

"I'm not ashamed. But it has ended everything for me."

Listening to the rain, in a vague fevered daze Esperanza tried to remember what it was she had seen, when wandering outside, which had brought back a poignant recollection of her mother; but in her thoughts, Luis, the volcanoes, Joaquín, and Bobo all jumbled in confusion. She was too tired and miserable really to get at it, though the memory had seemed so precious at the time. She heard her companion saying:

"They even say, some does, that Joaquín"—Esperanza had told Elena who was responsible for her plight—"is responsible for Bobo, some does, with María Teresa."

"What! You mean with Arnulfo's witch wife?"

Elena nodded slyly in Arnulfo's direction. "He's over there now."

Carmen, a plump, glistening little thing, with half-exposed fat breasts, piped up lispingly. "There's some say Bobo's the son of Huitzilpochtli and a cow."

"Don't talk nonsense," scolded Elena.

"'Tain't nonsense. Everybody knows how the big stone comes to life on evil nights."

Elena comforted Esperanza again. "Anyway, I don't see as you got any call to feel ashamed over something you couldn't help."

Esperanza shivered in her damp clothes. "I just don't want Luis, my sweetheart, ever to find out. He'd kill Joaquín."

Elena opened her eyes wide. "He'd kill Joaquín! Phew! Joaquín's a general now! It would be a good job. What'd you say your Luis' whole name is?"

"Cardona."

Carmen let out a shrill cry. "You don't say! Why, he's chief of the rebels over in Ozumba!"

Esperanza started up. "Luis! Chief? Then he got away. He's all right. Glory be!"

Elena pulled her down on a chair. "Don't shout so; you'll get put out. You're in clover. He'll be able to take care of you."

Esperanza laughed harshly. "He won't want me." She slumped over the table, head on her arms.

Elena stroked her wet hair. "Don't worry, honey. He'll under-

stand. And when he comes, Joaquín, the he-goat, will sure get killed. You'll get your revenge."

"That would be lovely!" gloated Carmen. She made a gesture of disemboweling someone with a knife.

"Is Joaquín still on the hacienda?" asked Esperanza.

"Nobody's on the hacienda," replied Elena. "Joaquín's out fighting for the federales. He was in here drunk just two nights ago."

Esperanza clenched her hands. "If he comes in again—I'd have to go out in the rain."

"No chance. He's off fighting in Ozumba. Let's hope he gets killed."

Esperanza gave a cry. "But so might Luis!"

Elena tried to buck her up. "Come, dearie, you can't give in this way. Here, have a last sip of hot punch. Listen. I have an extra apron. I'll fix up your hair real spiffy, then we'll ask Manuel, the boss over there, to let you work here, at least for tonight."

She took Esperanza through the door between the player piano and the bar.

A hush followed them, then music struck up—shouts, laughter, chatter, clatter—louder than before.

XI

Through the swinging doors came a peon, white cotton suit completely soaked. A plumber, he bore the sign of his profession about his neck—a toilet seat. This was merely the easiest way to carry it; besides anything pertaining to the strange world of the upper-class and the machine had sanctity and elegance.

Uncomfortable in his wet clothes, he grumbled sullenly. "A tequila."

Manuel stuck his knotty head forward. "Say, that's a funny layout."

"What?"

"That damned necklace of yours, that sparkling collar, that—" Manuel, though but an illiterate Spaniard, felt himself immeasurably superior to this mongrel New World riff-raff. "Your necklace!" Manuel shouted.

The peon sipped his tequila. He could not be hurried in his reply. "The judge has gone crazy."

"How come?"

"He's making so much money he wants every sort of new fangled thing. He sent off to Mexico City—these days when everybody is killing everybody else—for a lot of new fangled appliances. Even the hotel has only an old board with a hole in it. He's trying to imitate the Magdalena. What's worse, he has to have his cursed bathroom fixed up—all white tiles and a white tub—tonight, this very night, because General Joaquín de la Selva is taking lunch there tomorrow. He's crazy."

Manuel whistled and snapped one of his fancy sleeve holders. "How does the judge make his money?"

The peon screwed up his crafty slant eyes. "He's a foxy devil—army contracts. He has some juicy deal on with Don Joaquín for provisions."

Carmen poked the peon in the ribs. "*Ola! Cabrón!* You've got your worthless head in the noose now."

"No noose of your making."

She poked him again, with her elbow. "Buy me a drink."

The plumber looked her over contemptuously, then shoved her roughly to one side. "Go to the devil."

He flung down a coin and walked out mumbling.

Carmen grabbed a glass to throw after him, but merely shouted filthy remarks. Manuel told her to pipe down.

The weazened, runty sheriff came in, big tin star filmed with rain, and called a jovial greeting. Manuel set out a drink for him.

Again the swinging doors opened. A butcher staggered in, a skinned cow on his back, supported on his head by part of some membrane, stretched to tight transparency. The bloody carcass sprang up and down as he walked. Blood had run down over his forehead.

"Ugh! What a night. Give me a double tequila."

Manuel poured it out. "What do you think this is, a slaughter house?"

With his sleeve, the butcher swiped at the blood on his face. "No, the devil's own kitchen."

Manuel guffawed. "Ha! Then you'll roast along with the cow."

"Not if you're the devil's cook. Be careful. I've got a heavy meat chopper under my shirt. I'd love to crack that thick skull of yours."

"But, why in the name of the holy saints, are you running around with that on your back?"

Again the butcher swished his sleeve over the rain and blood on

his face. "The judge is loco. He must have this cow tonight, tonight mind you, in all this storm."

"He must be blessed sure Don Joaquín will come out on top."

The butcher grinned. "Sure he is. The rebels are licked; done for."

"What!" Manuel called to the sheriff. "You hear that?"

The sheriff nodded. "Joaquín put them to flight two miles beyond Ozumba an hour ago. They're done."

"Say, why don't you tell a fellow something? I'm sure glad."

At this moment Elena and Esperanza came back. Esperanza was now spruced up, her hair rearranged with a sparkling comb. She wore a bright pink apron, but her shoes were still wet and muddy.

Manuel's mouth still worked excitedly. "So the rebels are really beaten!"

Esperanza started violently. "My God! Luis —"

Elena squeezed her arm fiercely. "Sh! Be quiet."

"We've got to stand behind the government," said the sheriff, giving a little strut.

Manuel rubbed his knobby head. "Yes, no telling what the rebels would do if they came in."

At this moment, the butcher, bent under his heavy load, but sipping at his tequila, tripped up Concha just passing with a siphon bottle.

Concha's long legs tangled, she almost fell. She angrily let fly at him with a syphon, caught him in the face.

"You piece of rotten garlic," she screamed. "You'll spoil the flavor of that meat."

"You'd never be able to tell the difference. So long, Manuel."

The sheriff turned to Manuel. He drew down his little billy-goat mouth.

"That Luis Cardona always was too uppish. Glad to see him get it in the neck. Just think of *him* leading troops." He laughed, a cracked laugh, ending in a wheeze and cough.

"Where's the judge?"

The sheriff grinned slyly. "He's been sitting up in that new big house, the windows all boarded up, scared stiff he might get shot by the rebels. But the old bastard's been raking in money since the trouble started."

Manuel grunted. "Now he can open up and put out the flags."

"If the cursed sun ever comes out. Chihuahua! What a hell of a night."

The heavy rain beat on windows and door. Both listened.

Manuel polished some glasses. "Don Joaquín may be back here tonight."

Esperanza started apprehensively. Elena shook her head warningly.

The sheriff plumped himself down beside one of the bar-maids and put his arm about her. "Give me a kiss, daughter of the trumpet."

Elena pulled Esperanza over to Manuel. "This girl wants to work here."

Manuel did not even look up from his polishing. "Bah! There's too many of you slopping around here now."

Elena persisted.

Manuel finally looked up, saw Esperanza's big eyes staring at him out of her slim face. "Say, you're really good looking, not like the rest of these pie-faces, and young, too." Playfully he pulled her hair. She jerked back.

"Now, don't be so hoity-toity. If you work here you've got to love up whoever come in so they'll buy lots of drinks."

"I'll put her on to the ropes, Manuel."

Manuel grudgingly gave consent. "She'll have to earn her salt, though. Remember, kid," he said to Esperanza, "you've got to give 'em a good time, make 'em drink, see. Get 'em daffy about you."

The two girls sat down at their former table. Another girl, Magdalena, was drowsily resting her head on her arms.

The sheriff held out his hand commandingly to the girl he had just kissed.

After some protest, she gave him fifty centavos, his nightly graft in return for immunity.

He approached Elena.

"I haven't made a cent tonight, sheriff."

"Come across," he snarled.

"Not a cent," she repeated, stolidly.

"Come on, kick through, you've plenty hid."

Elena dropped the required coin into his hand.

The sheriff next shook Magdalena, still bent over sleepily. "And you daughter of a virgin."

She dropped a coin into his hand, then drooped again.

"God, you're a dead one," he remarked. "Nobody will knock at your door . . . Ho, my birdie. Here's a new one." He chucked Esperanza under the chin. "Wow, what a dirty look. Uppish, eh?"

"She doesn't know the ropes yet, sheriff," explained Elena.

The sheriff's little frog eyes bulged. "Seems as though I've seen you somewhere. Come, fifty centavos."

Elena snapped at him. "Let her alone. She's just come in out of the rain. She hasn't a cent. Look at her shoes."

For reply, the sheriff seized Esperanza brutally by the arm. "Hell, I know that gag. Out you go again."

Esperanza yanked away angrily. "Don't do that. You'll pay for it one of these days."

The sheriff merely laughed and shoved her toward the door. "Out, spit-fire, and soak."

Elena ran after them. "Here, sheriff." She held out several small coins. "I've only twenty-five centavos left, but tomorrow I'll make it up, or she will."

The sheriff eyed her lasciviously. "Well, my pretty one, you of all these strumpet liars have always told me the truth. Give me the twenty-five centavos."

He collected the customary graft from Concha, Carmen, Gloria and the rest, and jingling his ill-gotten money went swaggering out.

Several new customers came in, saluted Manuel and drank at the bar.

Shortly after, old Pepe and Bobo came in. They did not notice Esperanza—her back was to them—nor she them.

Pepe still retained a rakish air. Bobo was leering, sniggering and twisting his fingers.

The girls looked at him with fear. Concha almost spilled her tray.

Pepe went on alone into the corner stall, hidden from Esperanza's table, and ordered a tequila.

Bobo remained in the center of the saloon, shaking the rain water from his queer, peaked hat. He spoke in a hoarse voice. "Have you heard the dead tonight, my friends? The dead, stalking alone in the rain? Have you seen Huitzilopochtli biting the hearts out of his victims?"

Manuel started around the bar. "Out, imp of Satan. Such gibberish —"

Bobo hunched down like some animal and writhed his fingers at him. "Huitzilopochtli . . . tearing . . . out the hearts . . . of his victims," he growled.

Manuel, a superstitious soul, abruptly retreated behind the bar.

Bobo harangued the tables. "The volcano's lava pouring down from the mountain over all of you, all over the stinking dying ones."

Once more Manuel resolutely advanced. "I tell you —"

Bobo turned on him again. "And remember Huitzilopochtli likes fresh smoking hearts."

Then suddenly he sat down on the floor and wept.

Esperanza approached him. "Why do you talk so terribly? I, too, have been out in the rain, and I have seen no dead."

Bobo looked at her. An aethereal tenderness came over his stunted, brownie-like face. "The angels see only God, but the dead, they are here, there, everywhere, wailing —"

Esperanza put her arms about him. "Dear Bobo! Where do you sleep? Does no one at all love you?"

Bobo replied harshly. "The buzzards love me, for we eat at the same table." He ran laughing harshly to join Pepe in the booth.

The player piano struck up again. The girls and clients danced. Carmen picked a partner at the bar, and he whirled her around and around, her short skirts flying high on her plump buttocks. She laughed loudly.

Suddenly amid thunder and flashes of lightning there came a rattle of hoofs.

A group of uniformed officers stamped in noisily, swinging their sombreros free of water. Among them were General Joaquín de la Selva, Diego, Toño.

Though equally bedraggled, Toño looked jauntier than the others. To his charro costume were tacked the shoulder-straps of a colonel.

They all crowded up to the bar, laughing, talking, swords clanking.

Esperanza spied Joaquín. "My God, there's —"

Elena pulled her back into her seat. "Be still, he won't notice you. Come over here."

Elena led her over to the peons and girls at the rear table.

Concha was lying drunk in Gerónimo's arms.

"Can she sit here, Gerónimo?" asked Elena.

"Sure thing. Two are better 'n one." He put his arms maudlinly around Esperanza's shoulder, without even seeing who she was, then let it fall and hugged and kissed Concha again.

Arnulfo was now at another table. Gloria watched him a bit angrily.

The more sober peons stared at the officers balefully, half-frightened. Life, these days, was subject to military whim—the only law.

Joaquín shouted: "Hot punches, Manuel; make it snappy."

He slapped Diego on the shoulder. "The curs won't ever try to get through the Ozumba front again. God, did you see that fellow I split from navel to nape. The blood spouted out of him. Ha! Ha!"

Pepe and Bobo leaned out of their booth watching them.

"Here's how." Diego lifted his glass. "I wouldn't be surprised if Cardona got nipped, too."

Joaquín scowled. "That bastard. I suppose he'll be a general next."

Toño tinkered with the lemon in his glass. "Anyone can be a general these days. Collect a band of shoeless Indians, raid a plaza, presto —"

Joaquín downed his drink. "I should have strung up that Cardona long ago. I did it for that uppish girl of his anyway." He laughed coarsely.

Esperanza watched him balefully, eyes blazing, mouth quivering.

The rain drove through the door. A flash of lightning lit up the cantina uncannily, spreading a flame from windows to mirror. A clap of thunder rolled heavily over their heads. "That was a close one," exclaimed Joaquín. "What a night! Drink up, boys."

Toño, twirling his long moustache, piped up. "María Teresa said that when the volcanoes smoked there would be peace. The smoke mountain is alive again."

Joaquín jollied him. "What kind of peace is that. You and María Teresa, always— You must have found a new red under-shirt. Ha! Ha!"

He slapped Toño on the back. His own drink went down the wrong way and set him to coughing and sputtering.

From the booth, Bobo suddenly shrieked. "Smoke and lava, wuhuh!"

Glasses in hand, the officers looked around, frightened. The whole cantina grew hushed.

Toño broke the silence. "Hear that! Now, I tell you —"

Joaquín pounded the bar. "Come, Manuel, more punches. What the hell! Boys, drink up."

Elbow on the bar, one foot cocked over the rail, he turned around, surveying his staff. "No, war isn't so bad," he drawled in a self-satisfied tone. "Remember that little Spanish chit?"

Diego nodded. "A wild little mare."

"What happened to her?" asked Toño.

"I made her sleep with that fat hotelkeeper. Ha! Ha!"

"How in God's name did you do that?" asked Toño.

Joaquín whipped out his gun and poked it in Toño's ribs. "Who'd you like to sleep with now, dear Toño. The fat bartender?"

"Ay, be careful!" exclaimed Toño.

The cantina girls edged toward exits, one stood behind the player piano, ready to duck.

"Who'd you like to sleep with?" persisted Joaquín.

Toño's lips were white. "With the Queen of Sheba," he joked.

"March, then." Joaquín marched his cousin up and down in front of the bar. "Dear cousin, Toño, would you like to sleep with the fat hotelkeeper, with Apizaco or among the ghosts on the Sacred Mount?"

The other officers roared.

Joaquín poked his gun peremptorily. "I hate relatives. One—two —"

"With the fat hotelkeeper," hurriedly shouted Toño.

Again the officers roared. The cantina girls chattered excitedly.

Gun in hand, Joaquín advanced upon the other officers. His eyes were glassy, a gloating, sensuous light filled his narrow face. "Who'd you all like to sleep with?"

The officers retreated. The girls ducked again.

Joaquín laughed, put up his gun. Soon they were back at their cups.

"How'd you finally get that girl?" asked Diego, nervously stroking his spiky grayish moustache.

"Oh, that's right, you went off to the capital just then." He guffawed.

Diego replied ruefully, the lines deepening still more in his middle-aged face. "Yes, you sent me with documents."

Joaquín nodded gleefully. "Yes, you little skirt chaser. A man of your age, with a family. You ought to be ashamed. I told her I'd give her the jewels of the realm if she came with me. Instead, I had to drag her out by the hair."

A strained silence fell on the cantina. All touched glasses.

Joaquín looked at Manuel significantly. "We ought to kill all the Spanish storekeepers, saloon keepers. They're a nuisance. My folks were Spanish, but I'm damned if I'm proud of it. I'm a Mexican. Kill the Spaniards. Drink, Don Manuel."

Manuel drank. Hate glowed behind his forced grin. "You talk exactly like the rebels, Don Joaquín."

"Ho, I didn't mean it. I was just imitating them, so you'd appreciate us. Come here." He made Manuel lean over the bar and accept a brotherly embrace. "Good friends, you and me, Don Manuel," he slobbered affectionately.

Toño lifted his glass. "Viva, Don Porfirio!"

Everybody cheered, except those at the tables, who merely watched the officers, as they grew drunker and noisier, with increasing hatred.

XII

The judge rolled into the saloon, puffing. His whole abdomen shook, his glistening watch fob jiggled. He chucked Elena under the chin and went up to Joaquín.

"Congratulations. From all accounts, you are a great general."

Joaquín clapped his hands to get him a drink. "Did you fill those orders?"

"Everything is on its way." The judge's flesh oozed under his clothes. "As you know, I'm a man who stands for law and order. Our great Don Porfirio must be supported with the sacrifice of all. I —"

Joaquín poked him in the ribs. "You bastard!"

"Everyone who has talked in favor of Madero has been locked up. He —"

Joaquín shoved a glass into his hand. "Drink and shut up."

"You will be at my banquet tomorrow? The citizens of this community wish to express their thanks for your heroic efforts."

"I'll be there. But don't make a speech."

The judge's greedy, cowardly eyes bulged. "We are proud —"

Diego broke in. "Hey, Manuel, where's my girl?"

Manuel jerked a thumb at the group of peons.

Diego saw Concha with Gerónimo. He strode over and yanked her from her chair.

"You're my girl? Remember?" He plowed his face into her neck maudlinly.

She laughed and ruffled his hair. "Hi, there, colonel."

Gerónimo got up unsteadily and pushed Diego away. "She's my girl. I've been buying her drinks all evening." He pointed to the bottles.

His peon friends, terrified at his temerity in touching an officer, tried to pull him back. He wrenched loose and confronted Diego.

Diego, one arm about Concha's neck, looked him over. "You dog —"

Arnulfo, still at the next table, hurriedly shoved his chair back.

Gloria rushed over and grabbed him. "Somebody's gotta pay. You don't go yet."

He shook her off. "Gold teeth and crows, not for mine." He dashed for the door.

Gerónimo stood there, drunk, bewildered, obstinate. "She's my girl, I tell you. I'm a free man now. I don't have to answer to —"

"So, you're another of these dirty rebels."

Concha tried to slip away, but the colonel held her tight and gave Gerónimo a hard shove.

Gerónimo almost fell over the wire-legged chair behind him. "I've got a gun now." He whipped it out.

Diego made a leap at him.

They rolled over the table. Bottles and glasses crashed.

All the cantina girls screamed. Two crouched in a corner. The others rushed out in their thin silk dresses, bareheaded, into the rain. Gerónimo's two remaining companions took to their heels also. But the judge hit the door ahead of them all.

Esperanza had remained, watching contemptuously.

Paralyzed by Diego's powerful grip, Gerónimo let his gun fall.

Diego kicked it to one side. It flew toward the rear booths. Bobo picked it up and gave it to Pepe.

The other officers, except Joaquín and Toño, rushed up and laid Gerónimo out cold.

Diego, panting, and now also laughing, put out his hands and seized Esperanza, thinking she was Concha.

She pulled back.

He gave her a mighty yank that sent her flying half across the floor and reeling against the bar with a jolt.

Grabbing up his drink, he turned to her.

His glass half to his lips, he paused, amazed to see she was not Concha. "What the hell!"

Then he laughed. "You'll do. You're better still. Here's to you."

He pulled her close to him, and hammered with his free hand for a drink.

The other girls drifted back in, laughing, shaking themselves like wet puppies.

Gerónimo groaned, rolled over, got up dizzily. He swayed, blubbering to himself, then staggered out into the rain.

Joaquín suddenly noticed Esperanza. "Ho, little spit-fire. So you're here, now. A bar-maid. Ha! Ha! Ha!"

She turned her back on him. The actions of these swine did not seem important. Nothing mattered now. Luis had been beaten. Her thoughts tried to follow him. She prayed for his safety.

"Honey bunch!" gurgled Diego, maudlinly in her ear.

She wrenched away in a blaze of hate.

Joaquín blocked her path, hands on his hips, laughing. He caressed her cheek.

She struck his hand viciously.

"Won't you ever give me a break?" complained Diego to Joaquín.

The latter ignored him, clucked his tongue at Esperanza. "Little pigeon. Don't ruffle your feathers so much."

Esperanza made a dash for the swinging doors. But both Diego and Joaquín caught and dragged her back.

"Tonight, she's my girl," persisted Diego.

Joaquín, swaying from drink, ignored him. "Sweetie," he said to Esperanza. "Tonight, little sugar-cake —"

Diego flung a glass of tequila down his throat. "I tell you —"

Joaquín tried to kiss Esperanza. She stiffened, turned her head and put up her hand.

Diego was still pleading. Now he felt much like Gerónimo had a few minutes earlier. "Look here, you may be a general, but she's my girl, we fight for her man to man." He drew his pistol.

Joaquín was just as quick. Pistols drawn, they circled, facing each other like two cats.

Once more the whole saloon surged toward the exits. Manuel, posted near the calentador, was ready to duck.

The other officers, alarmed, stood off, urging peace.

Esperanza jumped toward one corner. She wondered whether to stay. But the thought of the rain terrified her as much as the guns.

The other officers continued pleading. "Come, put up your guns— What's the use of fighting over a cheap skirt?" A third officer proposed a jury. "Let the rest of us decide," shouted Toño.

Joaquín smiled. Both he and Diego knew this was, despite momentary anger, just friendly horseplay. Men, whose nerves for days on end have been rubbed raw to jangling, cannot subside to normal so easily. One must tone off gradually from the excitement of the battlefield. Drink helped. Sex helped. This fake simulation of fighting was merely an irrational effort to feed the nerves their accustomed dose of excitement.

"Come," pleaded Toño. Joaquín laughed. "All right. Guns on the bar, and we'll dice for her."

Joaquín spat on the floor and taking up the leather cup that Manuel slid to him, whispered into it. "Sugar babies! Sugar babies! Five aces now!" He rolled. "Two queens, by gad, not so good."

He took his second throw. "Come on, you small-pox babies. Ha! Four queens, two throws. I stand on that." He slammed the cup down in front of Diego.

Concha motioned to Esperanza to hide. "Scoot, I'll take on the winner."

Esperanza ducked behind the player piano.

Diego swept the dice into the cup and held it close to his mouth.

An eerie hush fell. The only sound was the relentless rain.

"For cripe's sake, roll!" shouted Joaquín.

Diego whispered loudly into the cup.

He peered excitedly at his throw. Everybody roared. "Five queens!"

Diego drew himself up perkily. "Do the ladies love me?—Ha! Ha! Ha!—Come, a drink on me, general."

"Sure thing." Drawing down his mouth mockingly, Joaquín put his arm around Concha.

Diego started to do the same. "My dear little Concha!"

"Easy, easy," snapped Joaquín. "Don't butt in everywhere."

"But it's my own dear little Concha. She's my girl."

Joaquín shoved him aside. "Fat head, you diced for the other bag."

They glowered at each other again, hands on their guns.

Diego finally shrugged, "Let's shake again."

Joaquín laughed. "Sure thing."

Diego took up the dice, shook the cup vigorously. "White bones rattle. Ha! Four tens, one shot. Forty points. I stand on that."

Joaquín cursed. He scooped up the dice with a single motion of the cup. "Come now, get hot." He rolled. "*Carajo!* Not a goddamn thing!"

He smashed the dice cup to the floor. "Take her. They're both yours, if you're man enough."

Suddenly from outside came the sound of shots. All listened intently.

"Some fool wasting powder," grumbled Diego.

"What do you think, little honey?" He rubbed his flat nose against Concha's neck.

Joaquín spoke a sharp command. "Colonel, skip over to the barracks and find out what's up."

"But —"

"Orders!" thundered Joaquín.

Diego, grumbling, dropped Concha, shook himself at thought of the rain, and darted out the door.

With a saturnine grin, Joaquín watched him disappear, then patted Concha on the rear.

"Well, little dove, I should have shot him, but he's a devil of a good friend. I just hated to do it. Come, damn it all, let's drink—drink—drink —"

He swayed uncertainly in front of her, holding his glass to hers in painful ceremony.

"Listen, baby, light out of here and go over to Hotel Sacromonte. Wait for me there. Understand? Ho! That fool Diego! One more drink, eh?"

He swayed before her, trying to meet her glass, then tossed off his drink, finishing it with a gargling sound. He seized hold of her and kissed her again and again, with pig-like grunts.

Cautiously out from the rear stall, Pepe, also drunk, crept step by step. His wild eyes were glued on Joaquín. In his hand was Gerónimo's gun. Bobo gleefully urged him on.

Concha and Joaquín were still in close embrace. Pepe crept closer.

Pepe, the always humble Pepe, was muttering to himself. "You

flogged my grandson. You flogged Luis. You sent them both off to the army. You raped my granddaughter. But now, if there is a God —"

Joaquín reeled back from Concha, panting, laughing, half sick and dizzy from drink, he leaned his arm and head on the bar.

Pepe pulled the trigger, just as several officers shouted a warning to Joaquín.

The mirror smashed. A bottle crashed.

Pepe dropped on his knees to pray.

Joaquín, uninjured, whirled around. "You old fool, you and your kind. The Huitróns—all bad, bad. All of you—skunks."

Joaquín smashed Pepe down with his fist and kicked him in the head again and again with his heavy boot.

Pepe writhed, rolled over on his back, groaning, grew still. The blood oozed from his mouth.

Joaquín, made savage by the sight of blood, brought his heel down on Pepe's temple, smashing it. He laughed grotesquely. "That for you and your kind. You'll never snipe anyone else in the back."

He turned around to Concha. "Light over to the hotel and wait for me. Say, tell that other wench to go with you. We'll have a hot time, hey? The three of us! Now scoot, before Diego comes back. If you aren't there—" He jerked his thumb in Pepe's direction.

Inwardly horrified, she laughed at him resentfully, then snatched up her tápalo and hurried out.

Outside, more shots sounded. Joaquín stiffened sharply, listening.

Diego and Rufo rushed in, the latter also in colonel's uniform. They saluted.

"A band of rebels has cut off our rear and is attacking the town."

Joaquín sobered. "What the devil. On which side?"

Rufo swung his gorilla arms. "Southeast. They are between you and the main body. The barracks can't hold out long. It's Cardona himself, I believe. They've got us trapped."

"Trapped, hell!" With a sweep of his arm, Joaquín flung glasses and bottles crashing to the floor. "We'll let the bastards have the town. They won't keep it long."

"Order our men to fall back on the hacienda—slowly. It's high

ground and stout. We can hold them off till the rest of our forces swing around. How many are attacking?"

"God knows. A good-sized band."

"Send an orderly through to Ozumba. Tell him to ride like hell. Have the major there close in on their flank and rear—fast. Have him shoot his cavalry in first and attack, whatever the odds. Foot soldiers on the double-quick. We'll trap them, damn their fool hides to hell."

The judge came running in, white around the gills, to ask Joaquín what it was all about.

Joaquín brushed him aside. Snatching up his riding crop, he stalked out, the officers pell-mell after him. Bang, bang, bang went the swinging doors.

The judge gaped after them, frightened. "My God! My God!"

Manuel bellowed about not being paid for his drinks.

The judge recovered his poise, instinctively one hand sought his shirt front. "Don't worry, Manuel, just chalk it up to Joaquín's account. He always pays."

Manuel got out his book, grumbling. "And if he gets shot? The crows don't pay anything."

The cantina girls, excited, crowded together, chattering volubly, about Pepe still lying in the center of the floor. They, the judge, Manuel, gaped at the body.

"He's dead —"

"Poor guy —"

"What a way to get croaked! —"

"Anybody know who he is? —"

"It's old Pepe—" said the judge. His watch fob jiggled.

"We gotta get him out of here —"

Manuel cursed out his helper for not having shown up on a night like this. "I'll get somebody —"

He rushed to the door and looked up and down the street into the driving rain.

Esperanza came out from the toilets. The first thing she saw was her grandfather.

She screamed, rushed over to him and dropped on her knees.

The blood still oozed out of his bruised mouth. His temple was crushed.

Outside there were more shots—a fusillade.

The saloon grew quiet. Rain beat against the door and windows.

More shots —

Esperanza, sobbing, held Pepe's wasted form to her bosom. The blood stained her dress and apron.

"Tata! My Tata! What have they done to you? O God! O God in Heaven."

The rain hammered. Carried on the rushing wind, it scurried in under the doors.

Hoof beats died away in the dark.

Firing sounded closer.

Esperanza sobbed and sobbed over her dead grandfather.

Bobo came out of one of the stalls and stood watching her, his head bent sadly, a bit inanely, to one side. Slowly, the tears trickled down his face.

XIII

In the salon of the Big House, wet military cloaks were heaped on the Moorish divan. Guns were leaning against the tables, chairs and walls; one, against Huitzilopochtli converted him into a fantastic sentinel. Soldiers were playing cards for cartridges. The officers were grouped together near the suit of mail. At the dining-room entrance paced a sentry.

Here, in the narrow theatre of an hacienda house near Amecameca, was being enacted a drama being fought out in a thousand similar places all over the land—a great tragedy, shaking the country from end to end, the death dance of a whole nation.

Joaquín and Toño, apart from the others, talked in low tones.

Diego rushed in with an aid. "Sentries all out, two on the main highway, one on each of the lanes, two on El Cerro, troops massed at the river bend. The towers are manned. It looks as if the rebels had drawn off."

Joaquín rubbed his hands with satisfaction. "If that idiot messenger gets through, we'll cut them off."

Diego threw down his wet hat and unbuttoned his dripping raincoat. "Anyway, we can breathe easily for the present."

Joaquín stood, feet apart. He had a bad headache and was trying desperately to collect his addled wits. "See that the main doors are properly barred. Use only the small side entrance. Have timbers ready to support the corridor and patio doors."

He strode over to examine the heavy shutters on the end window. "That whimsical Henriette. I was a fool to listen to her. Will the shutters hold?"

"It looks O.K.," remarked Toño.

"Shall I put guards out there?" asked Diego.

"No. Let the beggars come on. They'll get their bellies full of good, hot steel. Come—" he waved the other officers into the dining-room. "Let's have something to drink and a game of cards."

Diego detained him. "Say, what happened to my girl in the cantina?"

"Ha, still thinking about her!" Joaquín laughed loudly. "She's over at the Sacromonte Hotel. Want to take a chance and slip over? We can get along without you."

Diego laughed sourly, realizing how Joaquín had out-maneuvred him. "Two hours' ride through the mud. Let her have a good night's rest."

Joaquín mocked him. "How thoughtful you are of the ladies. No lady likes a good night's rest."

He called a servant. "Bring in tequila and anisette. Tell Henriette's maid, Sasha, I want her mistress to join us."

He turned to a soldier. "Stack rifles right inside the dining-room door. We made need them in a hurry."

The servant came back. "Sasha says the señora is already in bed. She'll be glad to see you in her room—but bring something to drink."

Joaquín turned livid. "Tell Sasha that if Henriette doesn't put on a kimona and come out here, I'll drag her out naked by the hair. If I can slop around all night in the rain, she can make herself agreeable."

He raged on, this time to Diego. "Confound it, I paid good cash to bring her over here. She'll toe the mark, or I'll throw her to the soldiers."

He stalked into the dining-room. An orderly poured out drinks. Cards were produced. Hands were dealt.

As the game proceeded, the laughter and jesting died down—only the occasional clink of silver changing hands. The pile in front of Joaquín rapidly mounted.

Henriette, Sasha behind her, came into the salon through a small panel door beside the horologe. She pulled her white fur-collar dressing gown tightly about her and paused for Sasha to catch up.

Sasha, a good-humored type, had a small, tilted nose and a red blur for a mouth. Her face was an oval window, cut in a wall of burnished hair; her almond blue eyes looked out with purely

sensual interest—a gaudy creature, quite young, with big handsome buttocks and bosom.

“Zee men are such idiots,” ranted Henriette. “To make one lose zee beauty sleep.”

Sasha merely sniggered.

The two women picked their way among the prostrate or sitting forms, scattered all over the salon, as through a morgue or a battlefield. Some were now wrapped up to their ears in sarapes. Others were stretched out on the floor, shoes or sandals kicked off, bare feet visible, toes sticking up. Some were smoking cigarettes; one was sewing a button on his muddy uniform.

A soldier cleaning a gun smirked at his companion, with a nod toward Sasha, “Fine little bitch, eh?”

The other made a shushing sound. “Be careful, that’s the general’s lady and her maid.”

The first soldier grunted. “Hell, while we freeze and die, the generals don’t go without theirs.”

The other snorted. “What are you belly-aching about? Haven’t you got a Juana in town, a young ’un, too, not the usual wrinkled hag that hangs around.” He hummed *Valentino*.

“A Juana, yes,” grumbled the first one. “But tonight? Not knowing but what I’ll get shot before morning? After all this slopping around I wouldn’t mind a little fancy sauce, a little chili with the beans.”

The other polished the mouth of a tequila bottle. “Here, have a swig and don’t take it so hard.”

“God, where’ve you been hiding that?”

The first soldier took a healthy swallow, then said in a fairly loud voice. “Let’s grab that maid. She’s a fine package. Ho —”

“Sh,” cautioned the other thoroughly frightened.

The first soldier gave a little tug at Sasha’s dress. “Ho, baby, did you ever —”

Sasha turned angrily, then seeing his grinning face, stuck her tongue out at him. “Sure, lots of times, but not with buzzard’s leavings.”

The second soldier laughed softly. “Ha! Ha! Take that.”

To Sasha the first soldier flung back. “You’re too fat to bother with anyhow. You bulge out everywhere.”

Sasha wiggled and lifted her skirt, showing garter and skin. “Sour grapes.”

She ran to catch up with Henriette.

The two girls stood on the dining-room threshold, Henriette rigid and hostile, blinking at the bright light.

"Why are you so unreasonable?" she demanded.

She held her white dressing-gown with one jeweled hand and surveyed the crowd contemptuously.

Joaquín answered sharply. "Damn it all, you'd better learn to please. These aren't times for foolishness. I'll send you packing."

"Ho, ho! You bite off zee nose to spite zee face." Her breasts jounced up and down.

This excited him. He jumped up and grasped her wrist and flung her into a chair beside him. "Sit there. Sasha, go over and sit by Diego."

Sasha sniggered and bounced into Diego's lap.

But every time Joaquín caressed Henriette, she pulled her dressing-gown tighter and wriggled away from him.

"Tonight, Henriette," he urged, "be nice, and after this mess is over, we'll take a jaunt to the capital. You can do all the shopping you wish. Anything you want —"

Gradually she permitted herself to be mollified. Finally, between rounds, she sat on his lap, drank out of his glass, kissed him and laid her cheek against his, unshaven though he was.

He dealt out the cards. His luck had turned. Diego and an under-officer began stacking up the silver.

Sasha, when all were intent on the game, slipped out with drinks for the two soldiers.

The man who had been cleaning his gun was slouched over half asleep.

She prodded him with her satin toe. "Here's to make your moustache grow."

He pushed his black hair out of his eyes and hastily buttoned his blouse. "Ah, you're a fine wench."

"Hurry up. Swig it down."

"I'll bet you're some high-stepper." He put his hand on her bare leg, just above her knee.

Pulling her skirt well above her knees, she did several fancy Cuban steps with a suggestive shaking of her body and breasts. "How's that?"

"Atta girl! You've got a motion all your own. Come, give me a kiss."

Sasha slapped his face. "Just a kiss? You're too bashful for me." She laughed boisterously and ran back into the dining-room.

The game was going on in tense silence. Cigarette smoke hung low. Now and then the players took a drink or talked in muffled tones. Silver and glasses clinked.

Sasha gave Diego loud sucking kisses.

Joaquín, now losing heavily, mopped the perspiration off his neck with a silk kerchief, then took out several big bills and placed them under his dwindling stack of silver.

"Bring champagne," he ordered.

The servant opened a bottle, filled half the glasses. Just as he opened the second bottle, shots sounded.

The officers jumped to their feet. Sasha and Henriette were dumped unceremoniously to the floor. Coins clattered, a glass crashed.

Henriette gathered herself together and reaching out a quick hand, swept the two bills from under Joaquín's stack of silver and deftly shoved them folded into her stocking.

Hoof beats sounded in the patio.

An officer entered, his face streaming with rain and perspiration.

He saluted. "The rebels fell on us by the river." He gasped for breath. "They began slicing us with machetes. We didn't have a ghost of a show. They'll be up here any minute."

Drunk though he was, Joaquín's orders crackled out. "Have every one fall back here on the Casa Grande."

All the officers scattered out.

Joaquín lifted Henriette on to the table.

"We may die. This is our last chance, prickly pear."

She sat there poised, leg and knee showing, one hand on her hip. She smiled ironically, thinking of the two bills and ruffled his hair.

He pulled aside her dressing gown with a vulgar gesture and grinned.

She snatched up a glass of champagne. "Here!"

He grabbed his own glass. "To your health, sweet Henriette. And to all their souls in hell."

He drank. The wine slopped over his uniform.

Joaquín pulled himself up dizzily, gave Henriette a slap on the hip.

"Get going," he ordered.

The two girls scampered off, Henriette pulling on her robe as she ran.

Joaquín staggered out into the salon where he bellowed out drunken orders. "Damn it, barricade the doors. Douse the lights. What'n hell —"

Officers and soldiers dashed to and fro and collided, cursed. Soldiers hurriedly stuck their toes into their sandals or shoes and took places near windows and doors.

No immediate attack came. The confusion and scramble subsided.

But the soldiers stood tense, clutching their guns.

The officers, including Diego and Toño, whispered, lit cigarettes, paced nervously.

Joaquín bellowed: "Men, we've got to fight for our lives. We're in a trap. It's fight or die."

There was more firing outside, then hoof beats, hundreds of hoof beats.

Heavy blows crashed on the outer doors.

"Open up!" sounded a voice, "or we will put every last man to death."

"Sons of evil mothers—" a string of curses was the response.

The firing was resumed. Bullets smashed through the windows. The soldiers fired through the iron bars into the dark at unseen enemies.

More blows fell on the portals. There came a dull crash, a splinter of wood, crash, crash, again and again crash. More shots —

The battering ram went through the outer door with a loud bang.

Sounds of scuffling came from beyond the dining-room—curses—hoarse shouts—a scream.

Blows fell on the barricaded unbarred window. A rain of bullets sizzled through adjoining windows so the defenders could not fire on those using the battering ram.

Rufo, until the last minute holding the outer patio, appeared in the dining-room dishevelled, smoking pistol in hand. He had managed to get the inner door closed and barred.

Suddenly the end window shutters smashed in.

Rebels swarmed through. One fell over the sill. Blood gushed from his mouth.

His comrades leaped past him.

Luis was among the first. With one leap, pistol in one hand, machete in the other, he hit the window sill.

Bullets spattered around him.

He jumped to the floor within and ducked to one side.

Joaquín stood near the Huitzilopochtli idol. Luis slashed his way toward him.

He ducked a rifle blow, swung hard and sliced the soldier half-way through.

Joaquín fired.

Luis set his teeth and fired back.

Joaquín threw up his arm, twisted about, fell.

But Luis had isolated himself. A rush was made for him.

He got his back to the stone idol and beat his assailants off.

The huge stone War God, with its writhing serpents, double masked faces, seemed to be grinning down with huge exposed teeth at the attackers.

They swarmed in on Luis from all sides.

He swung right and left with his machete. The sweat poured down his face, half-blinded him. His arm ached like fire. He could hardly hold out any longer.

But joined by other followers who had clambered through the window, he kept swinging his machete.

Everywhere was hand-to-hand fighting—grunts, curses, screams, blood.

Rufo whirled through the fighters and reached Luis from the rear.

He lifted his gun in a mighty swing to brain him.

But before the blow descended, Luis' followers seized Rufo and wrenched his gun away.

He tore himself loose. Flinging his great arms about the mighty Huitzilopochtli idol, that had originally taken six men to put in its place, he got it half to his shoulder and hurled it at his assailants.

It fell with a headlong crash, pinning a man under it and crushing the skull of a wounded soldier.

By this time most of the federals had been killed or had flung their rifles down and were huddled in corners, expecting to be massacred.

Rufo made a drive toward the open window.

Miraculously he shook off all hands, evaded all blows.

He leaped to the window sill.

Smashing back several entering rebels, he stood there sideways, half-stooped, swinging his long arms, ferocious teeth bared.

Both those within and without were afraid to fire for fear of injuring their companions.

He let out a great gurgling roar, waved his clenched fists and jumped out into the dark.

There was a sound of scuffling, running feet.

From the distance came back a harsh brutal laugh.

Luis stopped his followers from bayoneting wounded men. He had all captured officers and soldiers lined up against the wall, searched, then marched out. Toño was the last.

"Keep him here," ordered Luis. "We may need to question him."

Luis knelt beside the wounded Joaquín, moaning, almost unconscious, to examine his wound.

He turned to an orderly. "Bring clean cloth. I'll plug this up. He's losing blood."

Joaquín moaned and twisted, then lay quiet. His eyes opened. He looked into Luis' face.

"It's you," he said weakly. A spasm of pain contorted his face.

Again his eyes opened. He asked to be put in a sitting position.

He leaned back, pale and trembling. "You nearly did for me."

Luis cautioned him to be quiet. "It's our turn now —"

"The rabble will never win, never, not in the end," he snarled.

Luis smiled wryly. "Anyway, it will be a long time before you flog us or ship us off to the Rurales."

Joaquín's jaw set, half in pain, half in stubbornness. "I'd do the same thing again if I could."

He glowered, coughed slightly. Blood came out of his mouth. "You, you people—can't do—without—us. Never—never —"

XIV

The firing had awakened everyone early. Long before dawn, the peons stirred in their cold damp huts and got up.

The news that the rebels had won the hacienda, spread rapidly, and at the first light streaking across the sky, a crowd jammed into the Big House, shouting, "Viva Madero! Viva Don Luis! Viva la Libertad!"

Luis waved a friendly hand. "Thanks, good neighbors."

He gave them a brief talk then asked them to leave.

The dead bodies were carried out, sentries put out. "We have two hours to rest," Luis told his men, "then we must get moving."

The sheriff and the judge came in, on their heels another group of peons.

The judge held up his paunch. "Good morning, Don Luis." Luis scarcely glanced at him.

"I should have said *General Cardona*," purred the judge.

"We aren't worrying about titles just now."

The judge bowed. "We bring our good wishes, *General Cardona*."

"Our good wishes," echoed the sheriff.

The judge held his paunch with one hand and gesticulated with the other. "We are civilians, but our hearts beat in unison with the revolution. I have served loyally at my post. I am a man with eight children. I have always looked after the legal rights—" he half turned to the crowd—"the legal rights of my constituents. Now, we shall make a free Mexico by our untiring sacrifices in the holy name of our dead comrades. Our liberty has been won by you, brave general."

"Viva Don Luis! Viva la Libertad!" yelled the crowd.

Behind Luis, wounded Joaquín laughed sardonically, then coughed and winced.

The judge looked at him uneasily and pushed back his fly-away hair that customarily looped over one eye.

Luis clapped the judge smartly on the shoulder.

He jumped. His eyes, sunk deep in his puffy face, seemed to ooze out.

Luis spoke sharply. "We appreciate your lofty sentiments, but the federals may be back on us any minute. If they win, Joaquín here will have you shot."

The judge's bloated, octopus-like hands trembled. "I came," he stammered, "to invite you to a banquet at my home in honor or your brave victory."

"I'm sure Joaquín would have enjoyed the banquet. We have no time. This, though, is a great chance for you, judge. Pick out a rifle there and help us make sure of what we have won."

The judge hurriedly mopped his forehead. "I have a wife and eight children. I'm a civilian. I stand in my place, but as a civilian."

He hurried out, the sheriff at his heels. He continued to mop his damp brow, "A wife and eight children —"

He thought he heard shots—actually fireworks shot off by exultant peons—and his knees wobbled, his breath whistled, his

soggy face sagged. "Hurry, sheriff—I have a wife and eight children—I have —"

Luis turned to him. "Joaquín, the rebel cause needs money. Where's your strong box?" he patted his gun.

Joaquín raised himself on one elbow. "Not a red penny around here except what I have on my person—if the rebel cause finds it necessary to rob."

He sank back, eyes closed.

Luis searched him, found his wallet.

Scuffling and voices sounded outside. That of Arnulfo became audible. "Don't bring him in there, not into the Big House, man."

Another voice, that of Gerónimo, upbraided him. "Why not, pray? The hacienda is ours now. Don Luis should know of Joaquín's dirty work."

Four peons staggered in with Pepe's body on an improvised stretcher. Behind came Bobo, gesticulating and bawling, grandmother and Esperanza, weeping. Gerónimo had a bandage on his head.

"Here," directed Arnulfo.

The peons put down the stretcher, rubbed their blistered hands, and stood off, shivering slightly from their damp clothes.

"The poor old duffer!" exclaimed Arnulfo. "He never went near the revolution and look at him. He never risked no crows or nothin' and look at him." His eyes were full of tears.

Grandmother and Esperanza huddled over the body.

Luis turned about, saw the stretcher, grandmother, Esperanza.

He rushed toward her. They embraced.

"Esperanza, my Esperanza," he whispered, stroking her damp hair. "You've been ill. You are wet. You are shivering. Your shoes—soaked. Esperanza!"

He flung a military cape about her shoulders.

"Don't bother about me, Luis. I'm all right. But Pepe —"

Luis leaned over the corpse. "Who did it? Who's to blame? What happened?"

Esperanza swayed with dizziness.

Luis caught her just in time. He forced liquor from a flask down her throat, led her to the divan.

She shrank back. "No, not there!"

She seated herself on the fallen Huitzilopochtli idol and looked out the open window at the chill gray sky, fighting back her tears.

Luis sat down beside her, took her hand and looked into her face searchingly. "What has happened to you? All I've been fighting for, dreaming about is you, just you—" He put his arms about her tenderly. "That last glimpse of you, struggling to get to me when the Rurales were taking me off —"

Esperanza clutched at him. "José! Where is José?"

"I escaped. He was to do the same. But he was sent north to fight Madero. I'm sure we shall hear from him soon."

"If anything should happen to him, now that Pepe is gone, I should die."

"You don't even want to live for me, Esperanza?"

She averted her face. A hard expression tightened her mouth. "Don't—don't talk about that now."

The wounded Joaquín began dragging himself stealthily toward the door.

In a straightened voice, Luis asked, "Don't you love me any more?"

The tears rolled down Esperanza's cheeks. "More than ever, too much."

Bobo suddenly plucked Luis' sleeve, sniggering. He kicked the stone idol. "Huitzilopochtli has fallen."

Luis was angered. "Get away from here, you imp."

Esperanza remonstrated. "Be patient with him."

Bobo continued to snigger. "The stone idol has fallen. But I'm still here." He grimaced at them. "I'm here, Huitzilopochtli in the flesh—and it's true—all true—all you have heard about me, all the blood I've drunk, all —"

Luis scowled with repulsion. "What a frightful animal!"

María Teresa and another woman came in and joined grandmother over Pepe—three witch-like figures in dark rebozos, weeping softly.

Bobo kept grimacing. "All the smoking hearts —"

Luis became utterly impatient. "Get away." He turned back to Esperanza.

But Bobo plucked his sleeve again. He pointed at the three witches. "The Dead weeping the Dead."

The weeping grew louder. The women burst into loud laments, "*Ai, Dios mío! Ai Dios mío!*"

Luis strode over to look at Pepe, gently arranged the blanket covering him, and came back.

María Teresa tagged at his heels. "Don Luis, listen to me. Last

night in the storm I lit a watch fire and in red flame letters it said, 'When the Huitzilopochtli idol falls, my secrets will be told, but there will be no peace, for the stone was in the flesh of your oppressors, and the stone shall be the father of your child.'"

Luis lost all restraint. "What drivell! Out with you! I've no time for this wailing and riddle-making."

"Don't be so cross," said Esperanza gently. "She speaks the truth."

Luis fought for enlightenment. "You give credence to her superstitious fol-de-rol? Let Toño listen to her ranting. We have better things to do."

Toño spoke up boldly from the corner, "And have her prophecies been so wrong?"

His guard menaced him to keep silent.

María Teresa left Luis and Esperanza and went over to Toño. "Why, Toño, are you a prisoner?"

He laughed wryly, but good-naturedly.

María Teresa shook her head dolefully. "Ah, if you had only come back to me, I could have foretold many things. I could have warned you." She touched him affectionately.

Luis intervened. "Enough of that chatter, you and your red undershirts, and you, María Teresa, with your fake cures and nonsense."

Toño stuck up staunchly for her. "You are a bold man, Don Luis."

Luis sneered. "I was a 'General,' now I'm a 'Don.' María Teresa, your superstitions are worse than the priest's. Get out."

He turned to Esperanza. "Don't hide secrets from me." (Joaquín slowly dragged himself nearer the door.)

Esperanza saw that Luis could not spend much more time with her, but her words choked in her throat. She crumpled into a huddle and wept.

Luis, his nerves stretched to the breaking point after days and nights in the saddle and all the relentless fighting, was irritated, but stroking her hair, he said, "I don't know what is wrong, but it will all come out right. Grandmother," he called, "come here and look after Esperanza."

The old woman shuffled over, got painfully down on her knees and put her arms about Esperanza. "You must tell him everything, quickly, now. You can't let him go away without telling him."

"I can't. I just can't, Abuelita."

"Then I will tell him," piped up María Teresa.

"Be quiet," commanded grandmother.

She turned to Luis. "Listen to me patiently, with all the kindness your heart is capable of. Esperanza is in trouble. It was Joaquín. The night you left— She—she is going to have a child —"

Luis stared at her, then at Esperanza.

Esperanza got up. "It is true, Luis. I am not to blame. But —"

She started to put her hand on his sleeve, but hesitated.

"Luis, I didn't want to trouble you about this, so I went away. I came back only because of Pepe. I shall go away again. I love you too much to want to make you unhappy."

His face drawn he took her two hands, trying to look into her eyes.

She bowed her head. Her shoulders shook.

He spoke hoarsely. "I—I understand—God—now I understand."

"The old fate of the daughters of peons, Luis," said grandmother.

He quivered. "My God! I should have known at once. So that was the real reason Joaquín shipped me off. God! God! God!" he shouted.

Esperanza tried to calm him.

He shook her off, a red mist over his eyes.

Suddenly remembering Joaquín was in the room, his prisoner, he whipped out his gun to shoot him.

By this time Joaquín had almost dragged himself to the dining-room.

Gathering all his strength together, he struggled to his feet and made a dash for freedom.

Luis lifted his revolver.

Joaquín whirled, fell, plunged full length just inside the dining-room door.

Luis rushed over, turned his body over with his foot.

"He's done for, dead. A stench in the nostrils of God. I'll finish all of them, this peacock, Toño, too."

He whirled about, his gun levelled.

Toño shrunk together, pallid, eyes popping with fright.

Esperanza threw herself upon Luis. "Enough, Luis! Joaquín has paid, that is enough!"

Luis put up his gun. He dropped into a chair, his hands clenched.

Esperanza fell on her knees before him. "It wasn't my fault, Luis. It—it isn't—the child's—fault."

Luis straightened up, eyes glazed. "Oh God!—How long!"

He stared at Esperanza as though she were an utter stranger. "And now," he snarled, "his child to confront me—No—I can't think of that —"

"Calm yourself," she said wearily. "I am going away."

Grandmother had come over to them. "My boy," she said gently, "we have suffered, Esperanza and I, this day and previous days, far more than you. I have lost my husband through him."

"What do you mean?"

"Joaquín killed Pepe, and he killed Esperanza's dreams and hopes. Now we have to repair the harm that's been done. We need love, lots of love, Luis."

"You are right, Granny."

He put his arms around Esperanza and kissed her. "I do love you, Esperanza."

Then his brow creased. "But Pepe, tell me —"

Henriette and Sasha came into the salon, both fully dressed, Henriette in a trim black outfit with a white bodice, Sasha in a rakish brown dress. Both were distraught and pale. All during the firing, they had huddled in their rooms in terror.

Henriette looked around frightened at the disorderly scene. The divan was heaped with discarded muddy clothing. The furniture was scattered or broken. Two of the huge gold mirrors were smashed. Glass was strewn everywhere. Two carved legs and a chair bottom, stuffing burst out, hung over the coat-of-mail, making it look like a scarecrow. The stone idol lay across the floor. Blood stains were visible.

The two women hesitated, not knowing what to do.

Henriette started to go to Toño, then her eyes fell on the prostrate form of Joaquín.

She rushed over to him and knelt down. She gave a little scream.

With a quick expression of repugnance, she got up.

At once her face regained marble smoothness, showed no pity, only an enormous fear regarding herself.

Instinctively she realized Luis was in authority. She went over to him, Sasha right behind her.

"You have zee command here?" Henriette smiled ingratiatingly.

Her glance took in Esperanza—pretty, even in her muddy disheveled state. Probably Luis' sweetheart.

The French woman's normal cunning came back to her. She was calculating just how far she dared use her sex appeal with Luis without offending Esperanza. Or should she at once throw herself on Esperanza's sympathy—the girl she saw was good-hearted? A middle course —

Beautiful all her life, Henriette had found sex her great weapon, the only game she knew. Playing it now, her excitement and fright at once left her. In some imperceptible manner her body, as she now spoke grew more sinuous and suggestive.

Luis stared at her. So, this was Henriette, Joaquín's mistress. He noted her carefully coiffured hair, her doll-like face, her puckery red mouth. Surely this woman, alongside of whom Esperanza did not exactly shine, should have sufficed for Don Joaquín.

By rights she should pay for all this bloodshed and shame—her beautiful face should be mutilated.

His glance took in Sasha; her greedy, bold face, her body, plump, sensuous, like that of her mistress—though less refined—was intended for loose pleasures.

Lust crept into his heart. He could, it occurred to him with some satisfaction, force both Henriette and Sasha to yield their pleasures to him. He could rip off their false finery and treat them like common hoydens. Joaquín in his place would not have hesitated. Blood rushed into Luis' face.

Henriette saw the dark lust in his eyes. She puckered up her moist red lips; her body relaxed, grew melting, anticipatory. Its magnetism wrapped him around.

She had won power over him. She knew she was safe, knew she would not have to appeal to Esperanza.

Esperanza had not detected this psychic and sexual interchange. All she saw was an elegant, probably wicked, woman in trouble. Her instinct was to help all people in trouble.

"I should like to leave here," said Henriette, quietly to Luis.

He tried to be cold, matter of fact. "You are quite free to leave."

"Will it be safe? I do not wish trouble."

"You will be safe," he said curtly.

But as he wrote out a safe-conduct, his eyes played greedily over the contours of her body.

He called an orderly. "See that this lady and her maid get to the station safely. They are to have full protection."

"You are so kind," she breathed, standing close to him and holding out her white jeweled hand.

He could smell her expensive French perfume. Purposefully, as if from real emotion, she made her breasts heave slightly.

"I shall be at the Hotel Princess in Mexico City. I shall always receive you there at any hour." Her long lashes dropped meaningfully. "And many, many thanks."

She swept off with another heaving. "Thank you," echoed saucily by Sasha, who wiggled herself for Toño's special benefit.

A cry! María Teresa prodded Joaquín's body with her toe. "So, he is dead! Ha! Ha! Ha!" Her laughter was shrill, uncanny.

Arnulfo and Gerónimo, both slightly tipsy, entered.

Arnulfo ordered María Teresa home. "Lolita wants you to come cook the beans. Gerónimo is coming to eat."

María Teresa turned on him in a blaze. "Today, Lolita will cook the beans. Go on with you."

Arnulfo yanked angrily at her arm.

She yanked away. "I've more important business. I have to talk with Luis."

Arnulfo pleaded. "But Gerónimo's got money now. We've got to treat him nice. Isn't that so, Gerónimo?" He grabbed his wife again.

"Leave me alone," she screeched.

He yanked her still more roughly. "Come on, I say."

Luis intervened. "Leave her alone, Arnulfo. You people have to learn to treat your women better."

Arnulfo scratched his head. "It sounds funny to me, Don Luis. But if you say so —"

Arnulfo went off, still scratching his head.

"Sure is funny," he grumbled to Gerónimo. "What's a wife good for if you can't order her around or beat her up? If you can't even tell her to cook the beans."

María Teresa called Bobo. "It's about him, Don Luis." A far-away look came into her little dark eyes. "It's writ in the flame. When the Huitzilopochtli idol falls, many secrets will be told. When the stone falls, the flesh will be resurrected. For the stone

was in the flesh of our oppressors, and the stone is the father of your child; of many children. The stone never dies —"

Luis interrupted her. "Get this drivel over with."

María Teresa laughed coarsely. "You call it drivel. You shall suffer along with me. Joaquín was also Bobo's father."

Every one stared at her, Bobo hardest of all.

She enjoyed the amazed silence. "And so—just as I have said, the stone was in Joaquín, the lust of Huitzilopochtli. Flesh to stone, stone to flesh. Be careful, Luis, lest with your new power, the stone does not enter you."

Luis thought guiltily of the white perfumed Henriette.

Bobo screamed out. "And have I a mother? A big owl is my mother. Woo-oo-ooo." He jumped up and down on the stone idol.

María Teresa said emphatically, "I am your mother."

"You!" everybody cried. Even Toño opened his ears.

María Teresa was proud of her disclosure. "I was always wild. When a girl, I danced in all the fiestas and got drunk and was happy. I was a flame. I was really beautiful then; don't smile. All the men were crazy about me, even Toño over there." Her eyes glistened. "One fiesta, two men fought over me with knives. I ran away in the dark, frightened. I fell down drunk beside the road. I looked up at the stars, and I saw things, strange things, strange prophecies—things I've been seeing and knowing ever since.

"Don Joaquín came along on his horse and saw me lying there. I was all warm with drink. I was all alone. Well—" She looked at them all defiantly. "I did it because I wanted to. The stars told me. Was it my fault?"

"Wooo-eeee," cried Bobo. He grinned into her face. "Are you really my mother?"

Luis shook his head as though he had had a bad dream.

An orderly dashed in. "There is firing over by the river."

Luis whirled around. "Make it snappy. This business has just begun."

Bobo came up to him, sniggering.

Luis flung him aside. To his followers, he yelled, "All out back of the house." He snatched up his cloak.

"Luis! Do be careful," cried Esperanza.

"I'll be back. Don't worry." He kissed her hurriedly. "There's no time to lose."

Her face was bloodless. "Shall I wait for you?"

Contrite, he seized her in his arms. "I do love you, Esperanza. I shall always love you. I shall never blame you for what was not your fault."

He rushed off.

Esperanza sat down helplessly. Blackness enfolded her.

After a while she went over to grandmother, who had again knelt beside Pepe's body, and took her place beside her.

María Teresa, touching each gently on the shoulder, said in a dutiful tone, "I must go now to prepare the meal for Arnulfo and Gerónimo."

She went out, her long skirts swishing along the floor.

Bobo was again prancing up and down on the Huitzilopochtli idol. He rushed over to Toño, about whom Luis had forgotten, but whom the soldier was still faithfully guarding, and went "Whoo-ooo-ooo" at him.

Toño jumped and turned pale. "Oh, it's you!" He was terribly weary from his all-night drinking and standing up so long.

"Whoo-eee-ooo," repeated Bobo.

"Go away," Toño scowled at him.

Bobo clogged his feet, laughing gleefully. "Have you drunk the blood of the dying? Have you eaten their hearts? Huitzilopochtli —"

He danced away, laughing harshly. "Only the buzzards and the coyotes, and the witches walk over dead men."

He ran around like some little animal and jumped on the fallen idol again. He twisted his fingers and repeated in a wailing sing song, "Only the buzzards and coyotes!"



PART II



CROSS-FIRE

II

CROSS-FIRE

XV

LIFE continued. The rains continued. Fighting continued. More and more peons were slipping off to the revolution. The Big House was abandoned, locked, barred; no one in authority remained. All the horses and cows, most of the pigs, had been taken by one side or the other.

Poor folk had appropriated whatever was left, otherwise they would have starved. There were no crops. But thanks to good neighbors, especially Don Clemente and his wife, and Don Alvaro, the mask-maker, Esperanza and grandmother did not go hungry, for Luis was now the hero of the countryside.

They had buried Pepe. Ignacio, the young neighbor who had always loved Esperanza, made a coffin, and the old man was laid away in the little churchyard back of San Benito with not even a priest present, for Father Mateo had scampered off during the night of the fighting. There were no rockets, no tequila, no music; none of the customary village celebration.

Esperanza, remembering the cross Pepe had made, knew how grieved he would be in life had he known that no priest would say any words, that people would not drink happily when he was buried.

Bobo, who loved the old man, came with a big armful of wild flowers and sobbed like a big, sick dog.

Matilda was always a comfort. Esperanza told her all her experiences, among other things, how she had seen Caldwell in the hands of rebels.

Matilda said that several months previously, the flamboyant Pepita had run off with the young foreman. She had left her baby on Caldwell's hands.

Esperanza still wove mats, shivering at the door, or when the rains drove down, inside. She helped grind corn. But her body was sluggish, her spirits even more so. She was sad also because

Rey, her dog, had disappeared in her absence. She was worried about Luis and José.

Would Luis really come back to her?

And so she dragged through the days mechanically. Each little thing cost her triple effort. Her hands were two clumsy stones, hard to lift. She had fallen into the unvocal, stolid state of her race where she must mull things over by herself. Words seemed more than ever out of place. In silence she worked and waited.

The rain came down and down. The volcanoes were eternally cloaked in clouds as though, hidden and solitary, they were brooding over the sordid fate of mankind.

But one day the sun came out clear. The volcanoes stood up bright and silver—monarchs of the world. It had been snowing. The white coating came down to the lowest foothills near the hacienda—a dazzling spectacle.

Despite the sun, the day was very chilly. Esperanza had gotten up about three o'clock because of the cold and found tasks to warm her.

All day the peons went around huddled to their ears in their serapes, shivering. Later a wind blew directly off the foothills; it cut to the very marrow. Doña Angelina, a neighbor, midwife when Esperanza was born, came down with pneumonia. Fear of sickness was added to the uncertainty of the times. The frightened peons crowded into the chapel with lit candles to ward off impending evils.

But by afternoon the peons were running to and fro like disturbed ants.

Someone rang the chapel bell, tilting it over and over. Its sound rolled for miles across the countryside.

News! Marvelous news!

Don Porfirio, dictator for thirty years, had fled from Mexico. Madero had declared a truce. There would be no more fighting. There would be lands for everybody. Things would improve.

Older folks were alarmed. The closing of the hacienda had quite broken up the mold of their life. They shook their heads dolefully. "If the master does not come back, what will we do?"

But the younger folk hugged each other with joy and spoke only of the good days to come. All were glad the fighting was over, that sons and lovers would be back soon.

The following morning, Luis rode into the hacienda with about fifty horsemen—a queer conglomeration in outlandish

clothes and uniforms. They had pounced on clothing and other finery wherever found. One rider wore a fur muff on his left arm. Another had hacked off the tails of a frock coat.

They broke open the Big House and quartered themselves there.

Luis rushed back to look for Esperanza. He flung himself off his horse and took her into his arms and kissed her again and again.

She knew then everything was really all right. She was happy.

He held her off to look at her and shook his head sadly—she had grown so haggard. He himself was bronzed and healthy, full of spirits.

"Soon," he told her, "we shall have peace again. Courage—just a little longer."

He pressed some money on her and hurried off, promising to be back later.

Presently a contingent of federal troops rode up to the Big House. Everybody scampered off in fright.

But there was no fighting. The newcomers were peace emissaries, come to parley.

That afternoon the federals went off again, and Luis rode up to the Huitrón hut at a full gallop and flung himself off his horse.

Esperanza rushed out, fearing he was going to leave again.

"Listen, precious!" he cried. "News! We are going to Mexico City, grandmother, too."

Esperanza was thunderstruck.

He pulled her over to sit on the rock and told her what had happened. He was to disband his forces and take a regular army commission. He was receiving traveling expenses and a sum of money to go to Mexico City. There he would arrange for his followers to be inducted into the army or given compensation.

"I wouldn't do this, but orders have come through from the Little Savior (Madero) in the North for all of us to lay down our arms and return home. Not easy for some. It looks dangerous to me, but if the Little Savior wants it that way, it must be all right. Get your things together. We leave on the morning train."

Esperanza was happy and excited, glad to get away from the spot that had brought her so much grief. And perhaps in Mexico City she could get word of José. Luis had brought no news of him.

The following morning, Esperanza and grandmother were up

at three. They bustled around, putting the last things into their bundles, some in a straw mat, others in Pepe's old serape, still faintly showing blood-stains not entirely obliterated by washing.

The last thing Esperanza took down was the crucifix. Before wrapping it in a cloth, she pressed it to her breast. It seemed almost sacrilegious to put out the float lamp. Ever since she could remember, it had been burning there; often they had gone without food to buy wax for it.

All their belongings—the holy pictures, their meagre clothing, the precious China Poblana costume—all told, there was not much.

As they started off from the hut, mounted on two fine horses with which Luis had provided them, an orderly and an animal to carry the luggage, Bobo came running up with a nosegay in his hand.

Esperanza dismounted and hugged him.

"You are going away?" he blubbered.

"Yes, dear Bobo, but we'll think of you often."

"You'll come back?"

"One of these days, I'm sure."

"You'll fly back, whoooooee, like the buzzards—swish." He made a gliding motion with his hands.

He ran along with them to the crest of the hill, just beyond San Benito.

There Matilda met them to say a last good-bye. "If I don't see you here, I'll see you there," she said, gaily.

"You are going to Mexico?"

Matilda arched her body. "Ho, I suppose you think I can't find me a warrior, too!"

As they topped the next rise, Esperanza looked back.

Bobo and Matilda were still standing there, watching them sadly. They waved.

At Amecameca, Esperanza and grandmother found the station jammed—huge families, children of all ages, babies squalling, chickens squawking, pigs squealing, goats shaking their whiskers; bundles, bags, crates, boxes, mattresses, mats, blanket rolls—a milling throng, many of them refugees, trying to save all their pitiful belongings.

Luis and his men made a lane through the waves of the station mob. He was recognized. Cheers went up.

Though all seats were already taken, Luis soon had a place for the two women and stowed their bundles around their legs.

Then he disappeared for a time. Esperanza was frightened. Such a jam! Suppose he didn't get back. She crossed herself fervently. Suddenly he was there beside their seat again, quiet, assured.

"Have you heard about the manager of Estrella," he asked her. "Matilda told me that Pepita ran away."

Luis leaned down and shouted above the rattle of the train. "Yes. She left her baby behind."

Caldwell had secured a wet nurse and left for Mexico City with it.

He left too late. Below Ozumba the train was stopped by rebels and put out of commission. A wealthy hacendado and several others were taken out and shot.

Caldwell, the baby and nurse, were taken up to some caves in the foothills of the Smoke Mountain. There Caldwell found in charge the ex-foreman whom he had fired, the lover of Pepita. The foreman threatened to kill Caldwell and the child.

"I heard about it," continued Luis, "and sent orders he was to be released."

"Did he and the baby get out all right?" asked Esperanza excitedly.

"I suppose so."

The train passed great pine woods, then more open meadows, then hills. Other little towns of adobe buildings and tiled roofs and gardens. More jams of people. In the stations there were rivers of straw sombreros, rivers of white and blue. A happy buzzing filled the air growing more balmy. At a siding stop, a brook gurgled, leaves rustled, there was a tinkle of herds, the lowing of cattle. Churches were stuck up on the ridges, towers reaching into the clear sky. On a hillside a flock of goats looked like queer Oriental writing. The train roared over sharp ravines; women were spreading out bright colored clothing on the maguey thorns and sage brush.

After about an hour and a half, Esperanza caught the gleam of silver—a lake with high-power-line towers along one side. She exclaimed excitedly.

Luis smiled. "Lake Texcoco."

They skirted the sedgy shores. Far off she saw a hill-perched church sticking above a big town.

"That's Guadalupe—Tepeyac Hill. The cemetery is up there."

"Guadalupe!" Esperanza cried out. The famous holy Guada-

lupe, the most famous shrine of all Mexico. People from everywhere made pilgrimages to it; they walked a thousand miles.

"Will we get off there?" she asked, in an awed whisper.

Luis shook his head. "But it's not far from the city."

"It's very beautiful," said Granny, who had been there thirty years before, and who ever since had kept a bottle of holy water from the sacred well. All her life, Esperanza had looked at and touched that bottle reverently. It was supposed to ward off all ills.

The train jolted to a stop. Esperanza peered at the station eagerly. Black letters on a white board said: VILLA DE GUADALUPE, but she could not see anything except a swarm of beggars, dogs and venders.

Soon they rolled on. High towers—a mass of buildings—a road busy with carriages—an occasional automobile.

Esperanza had never seen one; her amazement at these automatic black bugs was almost unbelievable.

After some twenty minutes, the train screeched around a curve and across streets where other carriages and autos waited its passing, through a high gate, along a brick wall, finally under a sort of a shed. The sunlight was cut off. They jerked to a halt.

"We're here!" cried Luis.

One of his aides got their bundles.

She stepped out on the concrete runway. They helped Granny painfully down the car steps and jostled along with the eager crowd of passengers toward a picket fence and gate.

Beyond these they were caught in a whirlpool. A mob of frenzied coach drivers, hotel-runners, and newsies descended upon them yelling; a terrific din. Everybody seemed crazy for no reason at all.

Frightened, confused, Esperanza clutched Luis' arm.

With a curt, "Come on," he led them through the waiting-room with its brown benches and soon had them installed in a funny carriage with high, narrow seats.

After a deal of shouting and whip-cracking, they were wheeled out from the tangle of vehicles and were bumping over the cobbles.

Esperanza gaped at everything—the houses right to the street, blocks and blocks of them, little stores, churches, a park with a fountain. She sniffed the air. It was heavy with smoke, dust, grease.

They rolled into the Zócalo. Esperanza clapped her hands. "The cathedral!"

She had often seen pictures of it—a great building flanked by the red tezontle Sagrario and fronted by a eucalyptus grove and an iron fence. Now it was bathed in late afternoon sunlight.

"And that's the palace!"

"And that's the city hall," said Luis.

"How grand it all is!"

The streets were smooth now. They rolled along easily, the horses' hoofs clattering. The bandit of a coachman, in his greasy coat, cracked his whip smartly.

They rolled up to what, for Esperanza, was an enormous building, actually four storeys high—the Hotel Luz on Cinco de Mayo street.

Their bundles were taken into the shabby lobby.

Luis signed a big book, then they went up creaking stairs, carpeted with frayed red that gave forth dust, and down a corridor to doors daubed with big green numbers "17" and "18."

She and grandmother had a large room with green shutters and iron balconies overlooking the street.

She clapped her hands. "Why, it's a palace."

She threw open the long windows and gazed down at the traffic.

Luis came out beside her on the balcony.

Mexico was really very countrified those days, with a very leisurely life. An automobile was a novelty. But to Esperanza everything seemed vast, buzzing. How would she ever find her way around in such a big place?

She clung to Luis, happy, amazed, a bit terrified.

He smiled and put his arm about her tenderly.

XVI

Luis did not have much money. In the Peravillo ward, they found an humble vivienda or flat—two dark, windowless rooms, a little kitchen with tap water, a cement sink, and built-in braziers for charcoal cooking. An eight foot square back patio was surrounded by high walls. In one corner was a box-like contraption labeled "W.C.," an international designation long since abandoned by the English-speaking lands that gave it birth.

They bought furniture in the Pervillo market—a big place with hundreds of stalls; with vegetables, fly-buzzing meat, fish,

dress goods, novelties. For blocks around, the streets were jammed with venders of everything from rusty nails to bright, framed pictures of the Virgin.

They bought several reed bottom chairs, some straw mats (the price infuriated Esperanza) and a kitchen table. Even with these, their new habitation was bare. But Esperanza put up the holy pictures and the crucifix with its red float lamp.

- The little flat, one of several dozen, opened out on a long narrow corridor, which was a wilderness of clothes lines, dogs, squawling babies, slops, garbage, flowering plants in red earthen pots or tin cans, bird-cages. This was to be home.

As for grandmother, nothing mattered much now. She was feeble; her bad eye worse, the other threatened also with a cataract.

As for Esperanza, she faced these dark rooms and cluttered patio, poor air and light cheerfully. It was all novel. She had always known poverty. She was young and she had Luis. She was happy.

Now and then, though, she felt forlorn, lost without the village, the trees, the river. Luis seemed brusquer, full of command, harder to talk to. Their former simple love relation was gone.

- Nor did he say anything about getting formally married by the priest. Few of her people did anyway; they couldn't afford to. Even so, had it not been for the break up, they would, despite Luis' skeptical nature, have been so married. But now, after all that had happened, she was only too happy to have Luis. He could never cast her aside.

But as the days wore on, he grew moody. He called again and again at the War Department. He received repeated smiling promises, but nothing materialized. After his first few talks, he never got to see anyone important. One under-official finally told him frankly that nothing would be done till Madero came from the North.

Luis had been duped, taken in on an easy promise. He was ashamed to have to tell his two aides that they must shift for themselves.

Rebels who had maintained their forces under arms and were now living a life of semi-banditry, were far better off. He had been too trusting.

Now he was in a real predicament. If he went back to Amecameca, he would have lost the confidence of his companions and

would be seized by the federal soldiery; perhaps shot. Meanwhile his funds shrank.

The clear sunny days of Mexico City slipped by like shadowless ships, one after another. Luis scarcely knew what to do with his time. He would leave the house early, giving Esperanza the impression he had important matters to transact, but would merely trudge the streets or sit in the luxurious Alameda, looking at the bronze statuary—his thoughts daily more bitter.

After lunch he would sally forth again. But the very buildings were unfriendly. They stood there stolidly, massive, indifferent. One could not fall into easy conversation with busy people as in the country. No one seemed to trust anybody else. The city was hard, impersonal. He ached for growing things coming out of the soil.

When battling in Amecameca, the revolution, its purposes and outcome, all had seemed clear enough. But here the revolution was just grist thrown into the complicated wheels of the city, to be chewed up in cogs and spit forth as red-tape, graft, favoritism, scandalous debaucheries. Who ran the machine?

Luis realized suddenly he was only grist.

Where turn for work? Due to the revolution, business was bad. He had made no friends. Perhaps his money, by skimping, would last till Madero came into the city, then surely there would be a real change.

Just before the day set for the new chief's entry, there was a big bustle everywhere. Floral arches were put up. Flags and banners were tacked to electric light posts all up and down the Paseo from the Colonia station through the center of the town. The balconies were decorated.

Luis was excited, almost speechless. At last he would gaze upon the great liberator. The night before Madero's entry, he couldn't drop off to sleep till nearly dawn.

A terrific earthquake shook them awake. The walls were rocking, the floors creaking and grinding. Plaster fell on their heads.

Esperanza got grandmother to her feet. Luis helped them both. They struggled like drunkards out into the corridor.

Little better there. People were running hither and yon, getting tangled up on the clothes lines and props, dumping over flower pots, screaming. An old blind beggar, who slept every night under the wash troughs was praying to God in mighty wails.

The walls kept on rocking. An uncanny light hovered in the sky. The world seemed coming to an end.

Esperanza and grandmother knelt down in prayer.

Presently it was over. Some women were in hysterics. But mostly everybody was peering at everybody else wanly and laughing heartily as though it were all a great joke and they had never been frightened.

Esperanza went quietly back to prepare coffee. The earthquake made her think. An act of God—what did this mean on the very morning Madero was entering the city?

Recently she had been attending mass at a little, old church near the market, where one pushed through eating stands and a crowd of women selling little metal medallions on colored cords, like the one she had given José.

There Esperanza confessed to venerable Father Fernando, an old bearded Spaniard. He told her terrible things about Madero. Madero would destroy the true church and bring untold calamities. He proposed to steal people's property. God would never condone such robbery; it was the proper lot of the poor to be humble and wait for the good life to come—that was God's will.

But surely, she thought, Madero, who wanted to help the people, could not be a Godless man. But this earthquake? Was it God's anger? So her neighbors argued.

They heard the cathedral bells ringing out. Madero was coming to town.

She and Luis started out early to get a good place to view the parade.

Everybody had the same idea. A hundred thousand were swarming down the streets, into the main Plaza, into Plateros street, the principal business thoroughfare, soon to be renamed after the new hero.

When Luis and Esperanza turned the corner of Avenida Brazil into the Zócalo, they could see the huge bronze cathedral bells turning over and over, sending out a resonant roar, almost deafening this close at hand. The sound was joyous yet majestic, like a message from God himself.

The heaving jam here was so great, they decided to go to the Paseo. A long trudge, and Esperanza, heavy with child, was scarcely up to it.

They went along back streets and came out at the Columbus statue.

But even here the Paseo was lined ten deep behind the double file of soldiers.

But by patience and holding their ground, gradually they worked up to the front row.

Then they could see the granite buildings opposite, the gray-stone Royal Hotel, the solid glass front of the Café Colón, and the steel ribs of the unfinished Legislative Palace.

Even here, they could hear the roll and thunder of the cathedral bells, twenty blocks away.

They waited an hour, two hours, an insufferable agony of standing. The sun beat down mercilessly. Esperanza grew giddy. Luis put his arm around her.

The great bells tolled and tolled.

A long roar of cheers came from the direction of the station. People crowded; pressed forward. The police and soldiers shoved them back, threatening to use their gun butts.

The cheers came closer. Bugles. Drums. Cheering began all around them.

Moving flags. Cavalry. A column of dragoons came by in snappy, red uniforms. Then a carriage—*the* carriage!

The cheers became deafening. People waved their handkerchiefs, canes, hats, and screamed themselves hoarse.

Presently Luis and Esperanza spied the "savior."

People went into still greater frenzy. Tears streamed down their faces. Unknown men and women embraced each other. Tyranny was no more. The millennium was near.

Luis, heart beating fast, stretched his whole body to get a glimpse of Madero. He forgot about Esperanza entirely and in his eagerness almost pitched over the curb.

The carriage rolled forward behind two stately white horses.

At last! There was Madero!

Beside him was a woman in white, his wife. She sat under her white sunshade, a white veil floating airily behind her, and smiled graciously. She was clad in a long, white ruffled dress, full in the skirt, bodice puffed out and up, puffed-out sleeves—it came high above her neck on to her chin, in the style of the times. A funny little bird-cage hat sat on her head. Such funny contraptions are now worn only by such moderns as the Queen of England. But to Luis she was lovely. He would have liked to have knelt down before her and bowed his head as her eternal slave.

Madero was dressed in an ordinary store suit and derby. He

had a waxen face, pear-shaped head and a little pointed beard. He tilted his derby to the crowd right and left. No smile moved his face, no change of expression; he merely sat there and tilted his hat right and left, almost like a mechanical dummy.

But it didn't matter what he did or didn't do. He was the Hero, the Great Man, the Savior! His woodenness was but another indication of his power, his self-control, his greatness.

Luis stared at the little man, seated so stiffly in the carriage, and wished the hero might know of all his affection and hopes.

For a second, Madero seemed to look straight at him.

Luis' heart bounded. In that moment he felt capable of lying down in front of the carriage and letting the hoofs and wheels pass over his prostrate body. He would be willing to do anything, sacrifice anything.

The carriage rolled on and on, and the little dummy figure lifted the derby hat, up-down, up-down, right-left, right-left, left-right, left-right, up, down, click, clock, click, clock. And click clock, click clock went the horses' hoofs on the pavement.

The cheers swelled on down the avenue like a slow tidal wave, portentiously rolling its way in rhythm with the victoria passing slowly on rubber wheels. And like the far roll of surf came the constant booming of the far cathedral bells.

Luis drew a deep breath and looked around.

Just in time! Esperanza, pale as death, was swaying. She made a clutch for his arm, fainted.

He caught her, panic-stricken. Was her child coming? A miscarriage?

Fortunately the tight files of the crowd were broken, and though the street and sidewalks could hardly hold them all, Luis could now force his way through. Esperanza in his arms, he shoved and bawled his way along the sidewalk.

Running, panting, he reached a little store on Ayuntamiento street and laid Esperanza right down on the open sacks of corn and beans. His leg and arm muscles burned.

He gasped for water for her.

With an exclamation, the fat old Indian woman in charge, noticing Esperanza was pregnant, dropped the screw of rice she was putting up for some urchin and hurried to the rear. Rushing back with a small earthen jar of water, she sprinkled Esperanza's face.

"Rub her hands and feet," commanded the old lady. She began

unlacing Esperanza's battered, ill-shapen shoes. "She's all right. Just fainted. Nothing's likely to happen. . . . Sometimes happens. . . . Been standing in the parade too long."

To Luis' great relief, Esperanza's eyes fluttered open. Though still pale, she smiled at him, a smile that went straight to his heart. She reached out for his hand and squeezed it tenderly.

XVII

If he could only see Madero, Luis thought, everything would be all right, his problems solved.

But this proved more difficult than getting in at the War Department. Everybody had the same idea. The hall, the yard, the street in front of the small brick house of bulging windows on the corner of Londres street, where before the revolution Madero used to harangue whomever would listen, was now jammed—revolutionists, job-seekers, politicians, cranks, peasants, lawyers, every social category. And so, however often Luis sent in his name, it was always, after long hours of waiting, "Come back tomorrow."

One day, having come early, he got a seat in the waiting-room of spindle-leg chairs. Who should walk in with swinging arms and heavy stride, but Rufo Montalván, the Magdalena majordomo?

A quirk of hatred jerked Luis erect. Fists clenched, he started up angrily from his chair.

Rufo apparently did not notice him. Without pausing, he stalked straight into the offices of the great man. The door closed in Luis' face.

Luis puzzled over this bitterly.

In a few minutes Madero's reception secretary, Colonel Somebody, came out—a lean, sallow man with a cough, a white kerchief wrapped high about his neck. He nodded to Luis to come in.

Luis' heart jumped. He was divided between joy at the possibility of seeing Madero and anger and expectancy of a tussle with Rufo.

But Rufo was not in the secretary's office. Then he must be closeted with Madero. Luis was filled with hate and jealousy.

"Sit down, please," said the colonel cordially. "Smoke—?"

The secretary put one hand on his desk, crooking his elbow backwards.

"You know Señor Rufo Montalván? . . . He spoke very highly

of you, said that it was a shame that a good revolutionist like you should be kept waiting with the nobodies. . . . We did not know —"

Luis was puzzled. Rufo, then, had seen him. But why should Rufo, who had shipped him off, speak well of him?

The secretary continued. "Colonel Montalván, I believe, was a former majordomo where you worked. He told me he had had to commit many injustices, that he had injured you in particular. He did this because it was his job. All the time he was with you people."

"He never showed it," began Luis, recalling Rufo's glad sadism.

"He did marvelous fighting for the revolution around Pachuca."

"But he was fighting us at Magdalena!" protested Luis.

"His record with us is clean. It's fine," insisted the colonel. "He asked me to say he is deeply sorry for what happened on the hacienda. Will you as a gentleman, forgive him? He feels the past should be buried. He would like to apologize in person and be friends in the common cause."

Luis hesitated. He hated and distrusted Rufo. The majordomo was merely afraid of what he might disclose.

"We must all stand together," urged the secretary.

Luis had to agree to see Rufo.

In about twenty minutes Rufo came out. Embarrassment made him arrogant and friendly. "I wish to bury the past. I regret it deeply —"

Luis was disarmed. "If we're fighting for the same cause, that's enough for me."

Rufo seized Luis' hand warmly, almost crushing his fingers. "You want to see Madero? I'll fix it up at once."

The secretary nodded, and Rufo and Luis went in.

The room was large, sunny, covered with flowered wallpaper and furnished with typical upper, middle-class ostentation and bad taste—family portraited in big, gold frames, mirrors in bigger baroque gold frames, gold-scrrolled furniture with red plush, the inevitable tall brass spittoon in a stiff circle of chairs, and an ugly Talavera urn with ferns.

Madero, sitting at a big desk, flecked with light through a tree-shaded bay window, was scratching busily with a pen.

Luis pinched himself. Was he really face to face with the man whose name had become a magical byword in every hut in the land? This was the man who had overthrown the mighty Díaz,

who had promised to aid the peons, all the poor people of Mexico. Luis felt boundless admiration. His pulse beat faster. He breathed deeply.

Rufo and he waited respectfully. Madero laid down his pen, got up from behind his desk, came over, a serious but friendly expression on his face.

What a little man! Nearly a head shorter than Luis, half a head shorter than stocky Rufo. Because of his funny, pear-shaped skull and tiny beard, he did not seem prepossessing. But his bearing indicated dignity, command, self-righteousness. Power radiated from the slightest movement of his undersized body.

The serious friendly expression was habitual, actually his face was mask-like.

Rufo introduced Luis. Madero's hand was warm, soft, but the grasp firm, and never had Luis seen a glance so full of thought, so human, so generous. Yet the mask never changed. The man's whole soul was in his eyes, only his eyes.

"My good friend, Señor Luis Cardona," explained Rufo. "He raised forces near the volcanoes and defeated the federals in Ozumba."

Madero looked interestedly at Luis, noted his ranch costume, his youth, was not displeased by his obvious admiration. Cordially he asked him to sit down. Rufo left.

Luis, stammering at first, described the campaign around Amecameca.

"You have done well. I congratulate you." Madero cleared his throat, put his hand inside his coat, palm to his heart. "The people have made this revolution, not I. My share was very modest and not always dignified. One night I had to hide in a muddy ditch or be killed. I am merely a symbol. The revolution belongs to you and others like you."

He made as if to stand up and end the interview.

Luis hurried to explain his personal dilemma.

Madero's glance lost friendliness. Sadness clouded his eyes.

"We are all in a difficult situation. We must all have patience and work. Mexico requires that each and every citizen turn to peaceful pursuits to assist my government when it comes in to carry out its plans."

"But," stammered Luis, "I have no work. I sacrificed what chances for work I did have. I want to help out. What can I do?"

Weary lines settled upon Madero's face. "Did you join the

revolution merely to get a job?" he demanded sharply. "Remember, there are thousands like you."

"I will do as you wish." Luis was overwhelmed by Madero's sadness.

Almost imperceptibly, with a kindly arm about Luis' shoulders, Madero propelled him toward the door.

"We must all make sacrifices. But as soon as I am able, I want to make use of all loyal persons. Write me a memorandum of your part in the Amecameca campaign."

Luis went out, glowing at that personal touch.

But once in the bright sunlight, he realized that now he was really without any resources except his own wits.

Yet Rufo had easy entrée to Madero. Why?

Luis dimly doubted the revolution and Madero's effectiveness.

How did one get a job in the city? He bought a *Universal* and looked at the want ads. A number of things seemed plausible—check-weigher at a warehouse, a man and wife caretaker, several others.

He did not realize that tens of thousands were in exactly his predicament. The first job was already filled. The second was not open and out of the question because of Esperanza's condition. At the rest, many applicants were ahead of him. Nothing showed much promise.

Looking for a job when one's resources are low and where one has no acquaintances is one of life's humiliating cruelties. Luis went home beaten in spirit.

Were it not for Esperanza and grandmother, he would have gone off at once to join the rebel Zapatistas in the south. They were demanding lands immediately, were taking lands, not waiting on vague promises, and they were gaining ground everywhere.

A shame to embarrass Madero before he even took office, but men without land, without hope—were they to twiddle their thumbs and starve?

But Luis—he had to stick by the ship.

XVIII

A few afternoons later, walking despondently along Cinco de Mayo street, Luis heard his name called.

It was Henriette, her porcelain face traced with a cordial smile.

Her fingers lingered in his. She pouted reproachfully. Why had he never come to see her at the Hotel Princess? Her long lashes swept her cheeks.

He stammered that he had been very busy.

Her black dress displayed her long, soft body. She wore a dashing tilted hat; was elegant, sure of herself.

She laid her hand affectionately on his arm. "I shall never forget how kind you were. I still have the pass you gave me."

"I was glad to help you."

He could not take his eyes off her. Once she had been completely in his power. His whole body stirred.

She read his thoughts, was pleased. She really was grateful. The battle at the hacienda, then her terror regarding her own fate, had branded her with a never-forgotten fear. A horrible experience!

Her code was simple. Though utterly selfish, she believed all debts should be paid. She knew only one way—to make men physically happy.

"Don Joaquín was really killed?" she remarked, then shrugged. "I hated the refined beast. Come, walk with me." She smiled invitingly.

Luis fell into step beside her, embarrassed. He had on only a provincial ranch costume.

And so, talking of the hacienda, they reached a large doorway on Bolívar street.

"I live here," she said. "Won't you come up? Please do." Her eyes glimmered.

He hesitated.

She laid her hands on his sleeve entreatingly, lips pouting.

They crossed a large colonial patio. Numerous eyes watched them curiously. His face flushed.

They went up a wide back stairs and turned rear on the second floor balcony.

She ushered him into a small, poor apartment. The wooden floor had large cracks and frowzy paint, the wall paper was stained. But there was a large velvet black lounge and many pillows, a small phonograph, a small table, several easy chairs, pictures slightly erotic, French nudes with black stockings and bow garters.

"Make yourself at home." She took off her hat, patted her

hair and pulled her shoulders together sensuously. Her limber, soft body seemed to have no joints.

"You see"—she waved her hand about—"these are sad quarters, but what can one do these hard times? This isn't Paris. I'm lucky to have this."

She showed him the little bedroom, with more nudes, a large crucifix, a carved Virgin over the bed. The small, neat kitchen had a gas plate (it was before the gasworks had been blown up in subsequent disorders).

Still holding on to his hand, Henriette opened a little cabinet and took out a bottle of wine. "Take this on in. You'll find glasses up there. I'll get comfortable."

She came back in a slightly soiled kimono, piped with white fur. She poured out the wine.

"How terrible! There's hardly enough for two drinks, just a taste, and I really feel like drinking, don't you?"

Luis rarely drank, but he nodded.

She laughed ruefully. "I'm flat broke, or I'd send out."

"I'll send for it," said Luis.

Remorsefully thinking of Esperanza and how little money they had, he gave Henriette eight pesos for a bottle of cognac.

Henriette clapped her hands happily. "And afterwards I'll get a snack to eat. That will be jolly."

She went to the balcony railing and called down to a little girl—"Margarita"—who apparently ran errands for her.

Luis watched Henriette through the open door, the slim lines of her body, her trim buttocks, the long shapely legs in silk stockings, showing knee high as she leaned over. Esperanza, however pretty, was a peasant. Luis put her out of mind quickly.

Henriette plumped down on the lounge with a jolly bounce and gave him a playful poke. "It will be lots of fun."

Her upstage hacienda airs had all vanished. She was natural and gay.

He opened the cognac bottle. Henriette poured out double portions. Luis' hand shook slightly as he took his glass; his face was flushed.

She lifted hers gaily. "Here's to the blessed revolution and to you." Apparently she was honestly glad to see him.

They downed the drinks with a quick, burning swallow.

She made a little grimace, puckered her red lips, then smacked them. "Um, that hits the spot!"

She poured out some more, then got up and started the phonograph.

One hand holding her dressing gown closed, the other holding her glass, she moved her body exaggeratedly in a rotary manner in time to the music.

She danced over in front of him, and moving her hips to the music, held up her glass to his and drank the contents down. He downed his at the same time.

Winding up the phonograph, she then pushed the small table to one side and held out a bare arm to him, "Come!"

They danced. She clung close to him, but her legs were free and limber.

He held her tighter and tighter.

She ran her fingers caressingly through the hair at the back of his neck and laughed softly.

They stopped for another drink.

Finally they collapsed, laughing, on the couch.

After another drink his head was reeling.

She leaned over and offered her mouth to him.

He kissed her.

He stayed all night. And she, sophisticated, recognizing the bucolic simplicity of his love-making, took a diabolical pleasure in teaching him all the arts. She filled him with fires he had never known.

XIX

Luis arrived home the next day shamefacedly.

Esperanza merely remarked that they had been very worried.

Luis explained he had gone clear out to a suburb to look for work.

Soon Luis found himself in unholy enslavement to Henriette. He went to see her every few days.

They became, in a way, good friends. She had her petulant moments, several times made him suffer—she was such a false actress—but on the whole was jolly.

He learned something about her life, a terrible story. To escape it, she had run away at sixteen with a traveling man who deserted her, without a cent, in Paris. She'd tried to find a job, was taken care of by the manager of a garter factory, was thrown out, then was taken in by a poor painter. He beat her too often.

For a time she tried nursing, then became the mistress of Jules Langloc, wealthy patron of the same painter.

From Bohemia she had picked up a smattering of art and literature. From Langloc she learned her false refinements.

She had met Joaquín accidentally in a bus when her purse spilled; she had slipped out to a cabaret with him. He was a good spender, and had a whole suite at the Regis.

When he proposed taking her to Mexico, she jumped at the adventure. Well before the voyage was over, his too brutal sadism caused her to hate him ferociously.

Henriette never asked Luis for money. Her relation to him was as disinterested as her greedy nature would allow. But the buying of drinks, occasionally food, and other incidentals, made serious inroads on his meager funds.

One day she mentioned casually she did not have the thirty pesos to pay her rent. He offered her the amount, and she did not refuse "the loan" as she called it.

But as time went on, more and more he detected her laughing at him in some superior fashion. Her attitude made him furious, but he feared to lose her.

She knew he did not have much money. Another day she said to him: "You must know plenty of the new political crowd who are well-heeled. Why don't you steer some of them my way? I'm no pick-up, but I can't go on without some assistance, and I've had no luck meeting anyone who would take care of me in the proper fashion. And giving so much time to you doesn't help. If some one would set me up, then I could keep on seeing you and help you out whenever you needed it."

For the first time, he was tempted to strike her, but instead got drunk with her, and she, taking his silence for assent to her proposition, treated him with more royal abandon than ever.

Often Luis came home intoxicated from her rooms, and the following morning would wake up, suffering the effects of loss of sleep and in a vile humor.

Esperanza, now large with child, went about her tasks heavily. Though doubly upset with the knowledge that Luis was seeing some other woman, she did not reproach him. She was as thoughtful, as nice to him as ever. She loved him; felt that he had made a sacrifice in taking her at all. Would he—for the first time a real fear grew up in her—would he leave her?

Many long hours, tired though she was, Esperanza lay awake,

staring at the dim interior, the straw mats, the earthenware pots, the red glow of the float lamp—brooding. Often she wept silently in the night and after that sometimes slept. More and more her thoughts centered with real desire on the unwanted child in her womb.

Dangerous as traveling was for her, she went out to a special fiesta at Guadalupe, the celebrated little town which had so excited her when they first came to Mexico City. She went to pray that Luis' love might be fully returned to her.

To get there for the four-thirty Mass, she left before dawn.

She descended in the plaza from the interurban street car under the scraggly, eucalyptus trees and was caught in a dense throng before the rose-colored church—pilgrims of every corner of the land. Ocote torches flickered over the little eating booths and the stands, full of candles, medallions and knick-knacks. The big tents for the lotto and roulette gambling were up, though not yet open.

Dimly, beyond and above the church, rose the tiers of the Pantheon of Tepeyac; and on the site where the Virgin Mary had revealed herself four centuries before to a poor peon, a yellow-white windworn chapel pierced the purple-black vault of the sky, about it the silver aura of the first feeble light of day.

Esperanza struggled through the rag-tail crowd toward the lower church. Upshooting columns supported the niched face of saints and holy bas-reliefs. About the iron grill swirled a mob of ragged Indians. Whining festering beggars held up claws for alms.

Esperanza paused at a canvas-covered booth to buy a candle, then battled on through the tatterdemalion tide into the lofty green and gold interior, vibrant with the echoes of Aztec splendors and Spanish might.

The dark flared with thousands of candles. Over the worshipers hung a cloud of incense, giving the flickering tongues of fire a doubly weird aspect, like living hands clutching at the invisible. On the walls, through heavy Corinthian piers, enormous brass texts, with now tipsy letters, were interspersed with dim ascetic saints and huge historical paintings done by the foremost colonial artists.

Mass was going on. Censers were slanking. The brass bell rang. The Elevation: "This is my body . . . This is the chalice of my blood . . ."

Priests in white albs and golden chasubles over red cassocks performed the rites. In one aisle Indian dancers in feathered head-dresses were shuffling to the thrum of armadillo guitars—dances older than the Mass.

The ritual went on. . . . The Dead . . . then the Lord's prayer . . . "Per Secula Seculorum . . . Amen . . . Most Sacred Heart of Jesus . . ."

And the long, low echo from the multitude. "Have mercy on us."

Gradually the morning light sifted in from the grotto-circled lantern of the cupola and glistened upon silver gates and balustrades and shining candelabra suspended by massive chains. The church brightened—the slow, sure change from a night of star-like candles to the dim gray of morning—like the birth of a new universe, golden dark to pallid gray, softer, more intricate, as object after object became distinguishable. Soon the morning light, passing through the spirals of incense, crystallized into solid white shafts.

Esperanza, after crossing herself at the marble holy-water basin, had pushed ahead on her knees, her lit candle before her face. The swaying throng eddied about the saints ablaze with candles. It surged up around the white portal altar with its four columns of Scottish granite.

Esperanza's advance became more difficult. Huge sombreros rasped her face. She was hemmed in on every side. She found herself in a little island of kneeling women in long, calico skirts, blue rebozos tightly molded to full breasts and plump brown cheeks—all worming forward, young children, old grandmothers. Two small girls, miraculously escaping being crushed, wriggled forward under the same blue rebozo protecting their black heads; their star-like eyes shone with eager wonderment.

A mangy dog slunk by with a helpless yap. A peasant beat his head three times on the pavement. An urchin, chewing peanuts, knocked his heels on the ledge of a latticed confessional. Church is home to the Mexican. He is at ease there.

Esperanza's advance became stifling. Outside, the morning air had bitten deeply, causing her to shiver. The interior, steamed by such a crowd, was thick, heavy with the rank odors of unwashed bodies. Her candle dripped hot wax on her fingers; she elbowed, pushed, perspired and said her prayers.

She was thrilled, and the ugly world seemed a safer place, the

unseen feared powers more friendly. She reveled in the uplifted emotion of the Mass; the incense spirals became symbols of strange powers beyond one's control, but now placated. Gradually her emotions, despite the excitement and the first upsurge, were soothed into a sensuous peace, and her heart was saying over and over, "Preserve to me Luis and his love."

That plea, now, she felt, could not fail her. From song and color and art her emotions settled to a wistful mysticism, an intense gray-gold passion. Her thoughts jumped back to the Hacienda Magdalena, and her world abruptly changed to one bathed in blood and fire.

She went on down the sacristy stairs. The walls were covered—every inch of them—with homemade retablos, crude paintings of miraculous salutations by the Virgin of Guadalupe. Esperanza paused to look at a woman depicted surviving a Cesarian operation, a gruesome yet naïvely beautiful thing with a simple fidelity of emotion. But Esperanza, in the state she was, was horrified. Why did mankind have to suffer?

She went out the great portals, past the gambling joints, now going full blast, and turned right among the merry-go-rounds and ferris wheels.

She struggled into the Holy Well where the Virgin had once caused a curative spring to bubble forth. It was now enclosed in a beautiful little church of azure and yellow tiles set about a circular stucco-carved entrance with deep gray-stone, star-shaped windows. Inside, a ceiling bubbled with cherubim, and El Animo Puro, a pale youth, unconcernedly burned in livid flames. Gory images looked down at her on every side from altars garish and golden.

The well thrilled Esperanza. From here had come grandmother's holy water. The sulphurous waters gurgled up near the tiled floor and were drawn forth by a steel chain and copper bucket. There the sick drank; the ulcered poured the precious liquid over their sores; the residue fell back into the well.

One Indian had a rheumy discharge from his left eye; his beard was like the white tips of hothouse roots.

At a little stand, Esperanza bought a tiny flask of the liquid, doubly potent, for it had been blessed.

She pushed out again into the sunlight, happy, exalted, the clear light painting her flushed face a deep olive.

At last she had seen Guadalupe! Something in life thereby had

been completed. Something new had also begun. Luis would be returned to her, whole of soul.

She felt herself an integrated part of this warm tide of brown folk from all corners of the republic, heard the soft native tongues, felt herself drawn irresistibly with the great pulsing current, part of some great flowing fountain that swept like warm blood out of the very heart of Mexico.

Guadalupe was close to some simple elysium of planting and harvesting, was rooted in the centuries, deep in the fecund earth of life. Esperanza would never again look upon Milpa Verde as something isolated or remote; it was woven to the pattern of a bigger fabric, just as the straw she wove into her mats.

But the meaning of it all—though she felt the deep pulse of it—she did not know, could not surmise. And so, if by this visit, something was completed in her, something else was begun. She did not know it, but her soul had been started on a long quest.

Now she prayed for the child within her womb.

XX

Luis paced the flat, fury and worry in his face. At last he blurted out:

"We haven't a cent left."

Esperanza was suddenly happy. The Virgin had answered her plea. Luis had been returned to her—in pain and humility. He wanted now to face his troubles with her. She wasn't alarmed at all.

He clenched his fist. His eyes were bloodshot. "God, what a fool I've been!"

She smiled tenderly. "Don't reproach yourself, Luis dear."

He thought bitterly of the thirty pesos he had given Henriette, and an old betrayal came into his mind. Now he didn't have even the meager twenty pesos for their own rent, due on the morrow. What would they do?

He thought of Rufo. Would he help?

Luis spent the rest of that day and part of the next hunting. No success; no Rufo; no friends; no work—nothing.

"We are without a roof over our heads," he told Esperanza. "And you in this shape and grandmother so old. I haven't the least idea what to do. I suppose the landlord won't kick us out right away."

He sank on a chair, his head in his hands.

Esperanza soothed him.

Looking up into her eyes, he saw her great calm and shining-eyed gladness, a nobility he could not understand.

"If we can't pay," she said calmly, "we should leave at once, not let the rent mount up. We'll manage. We'll merely do what all poor folk do. . . . We'll make ourselves a hut where we can. . . . Often I've gone down the railroad yards picking up charcoal for cooking. At a curve in the tracks there are many poor folk who have put their huts there."

"Impossible!" he gasped. "I've tried to get a job, every day, I've tried."

"We'll go there, then," said Esperanza.

She explained to grandmother. They made up several large bundles and put things into baskets, cooking utensils, what not. Luis made a load of the table and chairs.

On her back, Esperanza carried a big bundle wrapped in a straw mat. In one hand, another bundle in a sarape; in the other, a basket. Grandmother, scarcely able to see, carried smaller bundles, one her precious bottle of holy water from the Sacred Well.

They stumbled over the uneven flaggings to beyond the Peravillo junction, ten blocks in all, past the walls of old houses, recalculated many times, now peeling so that dozens of delicate tints were inextricably blended like a series of phantom rainbows. Most people saw only that the houses were dingy.

In the oval space between the railroad tracks and the back adobe fences was a tangle of squalid huts made out of straw mats, flattened oil tins, boards, burlap and brush. Near the tracks was a stagnant overgrown irrigation ditch, excellent for breeding mosquitoes—they soon discovered there were millions. The ditch ended in a big undrained pool of greenish water, here and there striped with oil. The whole place stank to high heaven from the pool, heaps of garbage and human excrement.

They found a stretch of vacant wall. Esperanza undid the bundles and made a little lean-to out of several of the oldest straw mats. There was no room for the table, so they put it on end, legs outwards, to close up the space on that side. Out of an old five-gallon oil can and several short iron rods, she constructed a brazier on which to cook. They had forgotten the heavy grinding-stone. Luis went back to get it.

Esperanza found a rusty nail and once more put up the little

crucifix and red float lamp on the adobe wall which formed the back of their new home, then she set to work to make their first meal.

She did not feel unhappy as did Luis. This was life, fate. She took it naturally in the way of her people, long accustomed to any hardship—God's will, ordered thus since the beginning of time. And Luis was all hers again.

He marveled at her simple competence, the quietness with which she accepted this shift in their fortunes. What a loyal soul she really was! He swore to himself he would get them out of this filth soon.

That night it rained. It leaked through their matting.

They lay huddled, cold and feverish in their wet blankets.

Next morning half the oval space was flooded, the rest soon a sea of mud from the tracking to and fro of the poor folk in the huts.

The following night it rained again.

The third night also.

And that night Esperanza had her baby.

In these few days they had gotten acquainted with neighbors. Next to them was a porter, a squat fellow with matted thick beard always full of crumbs. Every day he went forth with his rope and shoulder pad to carry trunks or bundles. Mostly he was half drunk with pulque. From lack of food and heavy toil, his body was thin, his abdomen distended, his muscles slender hard ropes.

His wife, Doña Julia, was a big buxom Indian woman with an enormous paunch, who complained of a tumor. She kept her ragged clothes as clean as she could, her hair always neatly braided; she never let a night pass without washing her muddy bare feet in the irrigation ditch. She had had five children, one of which had survived—a rickety girl of four with peaked face and bare legs, nose always running, who came down with every ailment from colds to measles.

Big Julia saw with experienced eyes that Esperanza was about due. Hearing moans in the Cardona hut, she rose quickly from her own damp couch. Hurriedly she pulled the brazier inside out of the rain, got a fire going and water heating in an old oil tin.

She resurrected and boiled a pair of rusty scissors to cut the cord. She also had some clean cloths.

Grandmother helped as best she could, but mostly stood by. At the end, while Esperanza screamed through her worst pains, grandmother held one of her hands, or wiped the sweat from her forehead.

Julia, too, soothed Esperanza. 'Easy, *mi vida*, don't waste your strength—the pain—it comes terrible—then partly goes. Get the rhythm of it. Relax when its easiest. That's better. There, there —"

Esperanza quit screaming.

Luis crouched in a corner, his thoughts, despite his fright, bitter. The woman he loved was having a child not his. But even more bitter was the idea that she should have it in a dump like this in this horrible fashion, without the help of a competent midwife.

But women, he tried to console himself, were born to suffer, to endure trouble.

He listened to the incessant rain. The cold drops filtered through the matting upon his flushed face.

At last, unable to stand it longer, he rushed out and paced to and fro in the mud.

Julia was deft; she helped out just at the right moment.

It was a girl.

From this time on, their straw mat, their couch, bore the birth-stains, that no scrubbing could quite erase; it had become linked more closely with the eternal life process.

XXI

The baby—they named her Rosa after Luis' dead mother—found her home to be a small packing box. There, little concerned with the troubles of her elders, she lay on a pad of rags, kicking and chortling and ere long sucking her toes and staring up at the smoky straw mat, for a time her only sky.

Little by little, Esperanza had patched up their scarecrow dwelling, adding a flattened oil tin here, gunny-sacking there, to give more room.

Grandmother, feebler, mostly sat in the shade cast by the little hut and ruminated, no one knew of what, but probably of her long life on the hacienda, of Pepe, of her children, death.

Esperanza's one really tragedy was the day she had to pawn, for a few centavos, her China Poblana dress, symbol of her happiest moments with Luis before life had become tangled and

bitter, when her heart had been filled with pure girlish joy and hope. Not the hardships in life's troubles, not the heavy blows hurt so much as some minor resultant affecting one's most intimate sentiments. But food was lacking. There was a new mouth now.

A queer colony of outcasts lived there in the railroad sink.

Two emaciated rat-faced pickpockets and drug venders, quite unsociable, slunk in and out of an end hut.

David and Sara were two filthy creatures, he with a bearded face, nose partly ulcered; she a dumpy, toothless harridan with uncombed, greasy hair. Both half-naked, their skin showed through their clothes. Her blouse in dirty shreds, she wore a gunny-sack over her shoulders.

They slept mostly in the daytime and at night prowled the streets with huge fiber nets, into which they stuffed paper and rags to sell to shoddy factories. When finally loaded and stooped under their enormous balls of paper and rags, bigger than themselves, they looked like queer bugs from another planet. They rummaged in the garbage cans like lone curs; they tore the posters off the billboards, they cleaned away rubbish from back alleys, and continued to live—perhaps God knew why.

Lorenzo, one of the more husky neighbors, survived on twenty centavos (and occasionally a few extra pennies) which he earned by keeping other beggars from entering one of the saloons.

Gregorio, with his battered green derby, Charley Chaplin trousers and big belly, which he was always scratching, daily trudged up and down the Consulado canal, digging out tiny mud fish, which he dried, head and all, then peddled in the Tepito market.

One lanky, bearded fellow, Timoteo, blind, tapped around with a long slender yellow staff, the handle carved into a dog's head. His one luxury and pride was his tall, weather-beaten, fine-woven sombrero, on the big upturned brim of which were usually fragments of tortillas and other edibles. He and several other strange types, mostly diseased or malformed, lay on the temple steps and begged.

Esperanza often talked to the old fellow. His bony knees, showing through his ragged trousers, gleamed like polished mahogany. His soft beard, parted on his chin, curled up about his contented face.

"You never seem unhappy," she began.

He smiled affectionately, seeming actually to see her through his dead eyes—his face always had a peering expression.

"Why should I be unhappy?" he replied musingly. "One is unhappy only when one is young and full of unrealizable hopes, ambitions, dreams that are constantly broken by hardship, bitterness, disillusion. I am beyond being hurt by such things. I ask little more than the warm sun. My belly needs little. But the sun, warming my old body—that is bliss. That is all I ask for—only the sun; and mostly the days are sunny."

"But doesn't time hang heavy on your hands?"

"The sun is warm, my daughter." He laughed softly, and stroked his fine gray beard. "When I was young, I asked many foolish questions. When I first went blind, I was filled with despair. Life was a coffin of blackness. But now—bored? Never!

"Simple things please me too much, an extra coin, a bit of extra food, the new odor of a new flower, the bark of a happy dog, the sound of the church bells. No, I'm never bored.

"There are feet—footsteps going into the temple—the patter of children's feet, the rush of gay young feet. Some, God-willing, I know will become rich. Some will always dream great, happy dreams. Some are doomed to suffer. Some are kind. Some are hard. The feet of lovers—how easy they are to detect . . . Middle-aged feet. The dragging feet of the aged . . . The feet of sinners, the heavy, the swift, the slow, the cautious, the careless, the feet of idlers and the feet of the curious. About each and every person, I know something at once. I can even tell from a distance those most likely to pause and help me, even whether they will be niggardly or generous . . . And always there are the hours when it is merely good to be alive and feel the sun or feel a woman's caress. For me now, since Josefina died, come five years March, it is only the sun, only the sun."

"Only the sun?" Esperanza caressed his face gently.

"You are a lovely child," he responded.

Thus Esperanza swung into the normal routine, not at all worried by physical disaster, and never missed a chance to be cheerful and helpful with the others—a button sewed on here; something washed there; cinnamon tea for one of the sick beggars; talk; encouragement. They all loved her.

But Luis, mestizo, not Indian, never before reduced to such poverty, was standoffish with the others. The pain of his situation

boiled in his mind, not clearly but as a mixture of resentment, pride, uncertainty, fear.

Time and again he would groan, remorse always deep within him: "I have brought you to this."

"Why do you feel this way?" she asked him. "I have known poverty and hunger. One survives. I am here. So are you. We have each other."

"I don't like it. If it were not for you, I'd go off with the Zapatistas."

Frightened, she said quietly, "You are not bound. You can go."

"Esperanza!" he protested. "So long as you need me, I shan't go."

She went on thoughtfully. "You are not like us Indian folk, Luis, or you would not be tormenting yourself with useless questions. You get headaches for nothing. When the proper day comes, all this will change. If nothing else, we can walk back to Amecameca. Grandmother is feeble, but we can go slowly."

He shook his head. "It's worse there just now. I wouldn't have a chance."

Occasionally Luis did get some temporary, ill-paid job. For nearly a month he held a peon's job on a building. The peso and a half a day was now untold wealth to them. Esperanza was able to get a pair of cheap canvas sneakers.

Since his fall in fortunes, Luis had never once seen Henriette. He tried now to be doubly considerate of Esperanza.

But at night, when he should have been affectionate, often he shrank away from her, with a stiffening of muscles, a twinge of physical repulsion.

This cut her to the quick. She knew the reason. There were moments when he remembered bitterly what had happened between her and Joaquín. Apparently time would never tear the barrier down.

Often, too, Luis was unstable, explosive, sharply critical, like José had been on the Magdalena.

Of José Esperanza thought often. But there was no way to trace him.

One day Luis burst out: "It's the damn' city. I don't belong here. But when Madero comes in as President (that would be in a few weeks)—" His eyes brightened.

He had sent in long memorandum about the Amecameca cam-

paign. His efforts would not go entirely unrewarded. It was for this he lived, took heart. Madero was still his idol, his hope.

Esperanza looked at him pityingly. She knew he could expect nothing. Thousands were exactly in his plight. Many others would have influence or be more aggressive and unscrupulous and hence succeed, not on merit—that played a secondary rôle in political and most human affairs—but because they were less honest, more grasping. With a shock, Esperanza realized that Luis was no longer God to her. She felt far stronger in facing life than he did.

And so, little by little, her faith in him slipped away. Henriette had helped kill it. His indecision had helped kill it. A touch of cowardice on his part had helped kill it. Yet because of his very weaknesses, she loved him all the more tenderly.

But she also knew fear again. Weak, he might really abandon her unexpectedly—to escape from his troubles.

XXII

In the market, Esperanza ran into Matilda, the pock-marked girl from Milpa Verde. Esperanza's heart opened out to her—someone from home.

"You found your warrior?"

Matilda laughed. "I got this far."

She was clad in a black, cotton dress, much patched, white cotton stockings and tennis shoes. But she looked stronger.

She was working as a chambermaid in a cheap hotel, long hours of toil with practically no pay.

They walked up and down one street and another, chattering. "Do you remember so and so . . . ? . . . Don Clemente lost his wife . . . And look at this!" She held out the *Universal* and pointed to an item on the second column.

Esperanza blushed. She could not read it. "Tell me," she said.

"It's about María Teresa. She's here. She's been arrested."

The parents of some young fellow had had her jailed, claiming that to an ex-sweetheart of his, María Teresa had provided a powerful potion used to make him slowly turn mad.

"Imagine!" cried Matilda, "he's at Castañeda Asylum!"

Esperanza saw nothing strange that María Teresa should be arrested for black magic in the so-called enlightened twentieth century in Mexico. But she felt terribly sorry for her former neighbor.

"Let's go and see her next week."

Matilda's eyes popped wide. She added a juicy bit. "According to the newspaper, María Teresa is now living with a young chap named Lorenzo Romero, who is also a curer; she taught him. Did you ever hear the like! A bag like her—what luck! I wonder what she did with Arnulfo?"

Matilda went on to tell about the scandalous things that went on in her hotel. Her salacious little mind had not changed a bit.

Esperanza now found such gossip disgusting and silly.

One direct result of Esperanza's meeting with Matilda was that several days later, spying a second-hand children's reader in the market, she bought it for a few centavos and began toiling over the alphabet.

One day Luis caught her with it. He was very pleased. "I'm glad you're learning to read. That's one of the crying shames of Mexico—too few schools."

Thereafter he spent time each day helping her to learn.

This made her very happy, these few minutes of attention, laughs over this and that, little scoldings or praise from him. Sometimes, instead of looking at the text, she found herself watching his wavy, dark hair, the fine humorous crow's-feet about his eyes, his high, unwrinkled forehead. She loved him more and more.

On Matilda's afternoon off, she and Esperanza went to see María Teresa—a long walk over to Belén jail. The jail, named after Bethlehem, was scarcely a Christian place. Centuries before, it had been the convent of a self-flagellation order of nuns. Now, still surrounded by high medieval walls, sentries with rifles paced eternally, at night gave their periodic calls of the hour, "One . . . two . . . three . . . Alerta!"

The two girls hesitated before the portal with its two apocryphal turrets. At the jail office on the right, they were given two brass numbers to be surrendered when they left, and a guard in black and tan, rifle over his back, unlocked a growling gate, and they were conducted through the dark fetid old vaulted corridors, encrusted with white nitrate, dripping with moisture, the pave slimy.

Another door was unlocked. More corridors.

They crossed a small patio of miry black earth where grew one half-stripped, scrubby lemon tree, then through another gate, where a matron in a gray uniform took charge of them.

Down another dark corridor, they stopped before the iron

door of a cell with a little peek-hole window. The matron looked inside, ordered María Teresa to stand back, unlocked the door.

It was a narrow, high crypt, with a small, barred window ten feet up. A mildewed mat lay on the damp pave.

María Teresa shrieked with pleasure. They embraced, then all squatted cross-legged on the mat. Despite her feared calling, for the girls, María Teresa was just a neighbor from home.

She looked younger, well kempt, neat blue dress, shoes and rayon stockings, hair combed, and was not cast down in the least by her confinement. Her eyes, small and keen as ever, twinkled genially.

Her companion, Lorenzo Romero, she said, had secured for her a good lawyer. There was no proof. All silliness. María Teresa talked so convincingly of this mysterious legal world that the two girls were as awed as by black magic itself.

"Yes, I'm very happy now," María Teresa smiled. "I like Mexico better than the hacienda. Bobo is with us, too."

"Bobo!" exclaimed Esperanza.

María Teresa nodded, smiling. "Yes, he's quieter now. You know, Bobo isn't so crazy as most people think."

María Teresa herself enlightened their curiosity about Arnulfo.

"He's still on the hacienda with Lola. She had to learn to cook beans." María Teresa's belly shook with laughter.

"It's better for me here. So many country folk have come to town these hard times I've set up as a real curer and am making money. Lorenzo, too, has talent. He has learned much."

The mysterious Lorenzo came in with a lawyer.

Lorenzo was a tall, light-skinned mestizo of thirty or so, whose sharp features and piercing, mirthless glance sent a cold chill down Esperanza's spine. He held her transfixed, until, in confusion, she dropped her eyes. His nose, save for an aggressive hump, followed the line of his slanting forehead, then came up sharp and thin again at the end, where it was cut square with a slight chiseling at the corners. His hair, sleek, black and oily lay over a moon-like brow. His thin mouth was tight, the lines about his eyes crafty.

He did not gesture, but his long, magnetic fingers were flexible, and when the lawyer—a dumpy, flat-nosed man in a frayed brown suit—talked to María Teresa, Lorenzo's comments, uttered in a smooth voice, filled the whole cell with echoing resonance.

The matron warned the two girls to leave.

As Esperanza said good-bye, Lorenzo watched her intently. She flushed.

The following week, hearing that María Teresa was out of jail, Esperanza took little Rosa over to her place—in a large building with a big patio, lined with cheap flats.

The first thing Esperanza saw was Bobo sitting in the sun, fondling a yellow dog.

He looked at her vaguely a moment, then a broad smile wreathed his big misshapen face. He ran up to her and threw his arms about her waist.

She stroked his hair. "Bobo, it's good to see you."

He did not answer, just hugged her harder, his head pressed against her thigh, then quietly went off to his dog again.

María Teresa was still living with her companion in the dark arts—Lorenzo. At sight of him, once more an uncanny shiver ran through Esperanza.

María Teresa made a great fuss over Rosa, examined her closely, announced that she had a beautiful future, performed some hocus-pocus over her to guarantee her good health, and gave her a little medallion which she said was from the most holy shrine of Chalma.

Esperanza told María Teresa of their troubles. She did not mind for herself, but often, because of lack of food, her milk was insufficient or bitter, and little Rosa, who was usually a sunny thing, kicking her bare legs happily on her straw mat, then grew fretful and might, she feared, get sick.

"You must look for work yourself," decreed the witch-woman. "Find someone from Amecameca or thereabouts. I can tell you one thing more—I am sure you will find something unusually good. It has been told."

When Esperanza was ready to leave, Lorenzo played with Rosa and alternately smiled at Esperanza. Now and then his hand touched hers, and once, trying to capture Rosa's little fist, his hand came against Esperanza's breast.

His touch rippled all through her. His crafty smile made her shiver.

When he shook her hand to say good-bye, his fingers lingered in hers with caressing insistence.

Again a shudder went through her, not exactly of repulsion, but as when some one takes an unusual, bitter medicine.

She hurried off, panting slightly, and wondered at herself.

XXIII

The only well-to-do person Esperanza could think of from Amecameca was Don Joaquín's widow. A little inquiry gave her the address—in the Colonia Juárez; and she trudged out there—a tall, grey stone house with iron-barred fence.

The servant, a pious sharp-faced girl, eyed Esperanza suspiciously. But when she found it was some one from the Hacienda Magdalena who hadn't come to beg, she told Esperanza to wait in the hall.

Esperanza suddenly realized the enormity of her having come here. Señora de la Selva would surely know how her husband had died. Would she know that Esperanza was Luis' wife?

But Don Joaquín was responsible for the baby.

She heard a rustle and stood up to greet a little, white-faced woman in crinkly black taffeta that fell stiffly in fluted folds. The señora, though young, still rather pretty, had a hard, bigotedly religious look. She spoke with annoyance. "You are from Magdalena?"

"I am Esperanza Huitrón. Do you remember —?"

"Yes, yes, the little granddaughter of Abuelita. You were such a bright, sunny girl. And so now you are in Mexico. Things certainly have changed. Terrible. And Abuelita still lives?"

Esperanza told of her grandmother's ailments.

"Naturally she's pretty old," said the señora, with an inexpressive gesture. "She should thank God for a long life."

Joaquín's death was not mentioned. Nor did the widow ask to whom Esperanza was married, merely remarked that having a baby made it more difficult to get work. She, herself, had already discharged several servants to cut down expenses. Then her face brightened. "My sister, Señora Sandoval, was telling me of an American who brought a motherless baby in from the country when trouble started. He wants somebody with a baby of her own. Just the chance for you."

Señora Sandoval's house was in the Colonia Santa María, clear across the city. Esperanza walked and walked—her legs ached—down past the Colonia station, the Salto de Alvarado boulevard, the American cemetery, finally turned right on Santa María Ribera until she reached the old-fashioned plaza of the Colonia. From there it was only two blocks.

On a cobbled, grass-grown street, lined with venerable shade

trees, Esperanza was admitted to an old colonial place, through wide entrance steps to a mezzanine balcony running about a big patio full of flowers, stunted orange trees, birds, and a sparkling fountain.

A heavy tread, a rustling of draperies, and out of a big, pompous doorway came a big, pompous female, Señora Sandoval, a fat woman with broad shoulders, triple chin and babyish pig face, much massaged.

Golden adornments down the front of her elegant purple gown made her look like a female saint on which superstitious folk have pinned ex votos of miraculous salvation.

Esperanza explained her purpose. Señora Sandoval departed, like a puffing peacock, to call her daughter, Marta.

Marta was a dark-eyed beauty, just swelling into very voluptuous womanhood. Her smooth, black hair drawn tight on either side of her low, white brow and sweet passionate face, was knotted in the back—it glistened like anthracite. Deep violet shadows lay under her dark lustrous eyes. Her full moist red lips constantly quivered with a friendly smile. Esperanza was at once aware of the pureness of race in her beauty—the Spanish type product of centuries of selection and refinement. She had seen Marta on the hacienda and now, meeting her, liked her immediately.

“Yes, yes,” Marta told Esperanza eagerly in a voice rich and throaty. “I have a friend, an American gentleman, who needs a nurse.” She went on to explain. “It’s such a sweet baby!”

They took a carriage out to the Charles V glorieta and down the wide tree-shaded Paseo out by Chapultepec Park to the Condesa apartments—a big edifice surrounded by hedges and pergolas.

At a third floor apartment, the servant, a tall frizzy-haired woman, said “Meester” Caldwell would be back to lunch any minute.

So—it was the American from Estrellita!

Caldwell finally came in, looking bigger and better built than Esperanza remembered him. A genial twinkle enlivened his grim squarish face—the frank innocent gaze of a crafty man.

“Marta!” he exclaimed, with a low gurgle and took her hands affectionately. “What a bewitching hat!”

They knew each other well. Marta was evidently in love with him.

"I have found you a nurse. This girl is from my aunt's hacienda and was a great favorite. The servants from outside of Mexico are more honest."

"How thoughtful of you! I was on the verge of desperation." His voice, though kindly, was brittle.

He questioned Esperanza at length and, satisfied, took her in to see the baby, asleep in a little screened bed—beautiful surroundings compared to the misery Rosa had endured.

"She is lovely!" exclaimed Esperanza.

"Winifred is her name." Caldwell asked Marta to explain to Esperanza just when the baby was to be fed and bathed, the whole routine.

Esperanza's salary would be thirty pesos a month—a phenomenal amount, double what she had dreamed of getting.

"I'll—I'll take it," she stammered. "I have to speak to my husband first, but I'm sure it will be all right."

Marta showed her her room. After the squalor of their hut, it was paradise. Except for her night in the Hotel Lux, Esperanza, her whole life long, had never slept in a bed. She was glad for Rosa's sake.

It was long after lunch time when Esperanza got back to the hut.

Luis was upset. "Where have you been?" he demanded harshly, and was sullen when she explained.

"It's far better," she argued. "You and grandmother can get a couple of rooms and can keep from going hungry. Rosa, with me, will get proper nourishment."

He couldn't oppose her. They didn't have a cent. But he made her swear that when Madero came in and he got his commission, she would give it up.

In her new home, with good food, a comfortable bed, sanitary surroundings, Esperanza put on weight; her haggard look disappeared. Suffering had ennobled her features. Soon she was more beautiful than ever.

Once a week, Dr. Enrique Chávez, a young physician, came to have a look at little Winifred.

He was a very serious chap with a slim nose and spectacles, but when jolted out of professional absorption, was very jolly.

He always had a look at Rosa, too, and once prescribed for her when she had a slight colic. He showed Esperanza how to keep charts pertaining to Winifred.

It was all new to Esperanza; most babies, she had thought, just grew up.

Caldwell, though curt and busy, was kind. He gave her several dresses and extra money and clothes for Rosa. Home at noon, he spent all his time playing with Winifred. He asked Esperanza minute questions about her, also about her own life. Esperanza's quiet dignity and reticence inspired confidence. Caldwell praised her. She was thrilled.

One foggy morning, he said, with a wry face: "I wish I were back in Cuatla. That was the perfect lazy climate."

She nodded. "And usually I wish I were back in Milpa Verde."

"But it is cold there. But Cuatla—a dream." He mused a bit. "Still it's well to have a little soggy damp in the bones. In Cuatla ideas ferment in the hot air, ideas and most other things."

Was he, Esperanza wondered, still in love with Pepita?

Another time, they talked of Mexico. He said it was very backward.

She had never considered things in that light. Milpa Verde was merely different—one slept on mats instead of beds. Her values were in terms of moral relationships. But she did not contradict him when he eulogized capital, machines, foreign initiative, progress, for he was rich, very wise; she had learned much in his house. But she felt that somehow he was wrong.

Gradually from the cook, Josefina—formerly Caldwell's housekeeper down on the Estrella plantation—Esperanza learned other things about Caldwell.

"Marta, now, she's terribly in love with Meester Caldwell." Josefina shook her frizzy hair and drew down her lips lugubriously. "For a good girl, that's too bad, 'cause he got him a wife and child in the United States, and they'll be coming down here 'fore so long."

Esperanza asked about Pepita.

Josefina put her finger to her thick lips. "That's a powerful secret."

"She was very beautiful," persisted Esperanza, busy sudsing diapers.

"And just come fourteen," Josefina added in a salacious tone. "Lordy, Lordy, what goings on I did see."

"Where is she now?"

"La, la. One bright day, just before the revolution, she up and runs off with the foreman and leaves her baby behind and all."

"I couldn't leave my baby that way!" cried Esperanza.

"Yes, but you ain't like us folk." Josefina put a big pan on the stove and stood with her hands on her hips. "We folk from Estrella got negro blood. Pepita, you ought to see her, how she quiver all over whenever the drums was a beating and they was a-blowing on the jars. You could just see she'd be a-running off some bright day. She had something wild, something wild in her blood."

Esperanza was intrigued by the idea that the little white girl she was tending—daughter of the very austere Meester Caldwell—had black blood. What would he tell his wife about the child?

She compared Winifred with her own little Rosa, eleven months younger. Winifred was tiny, delicate, fragile as fine china-ware, perhaps because her mother had been so young. Already there was something uncannily still and deep in Winifred's little soul. Rosa, despite all their hardship, was stronger. Rosa demanded things imperatively, was always bouncing about, full of whims and drolleries.

Several times Caldwell asked Esperanza to help Josefina out with dinner parties. That meant working late at night. Every fork, knife, spoon, dish, and the napkins and glasses had to go exactly in the proper places—Josefina knew just how. It seemed fussy to Esperanza, still the table did look nice. Josefina also showed her how to serve. Esperanza had to do her hair up properly, put on a black dress and white lace apron.

The table conversation puzzled her. The attitude was humorous, casual—her people had little humor of that kind. The guests seemed always to skirt all direct statements. Only when they talked of the revolution were their words direct and bitter. The Indians were just animals; had no right to human treatment. One woman boasted how her husband had killed a peon at least once a week to keep discipline. A pretty young creature, very décolleté, she said this with a flare of her nostrils like a wild animal smelling blood. Weak and pampered, naturally she felt more fiercely than any healthy male.

Caldwell lifted his eyebrows with a contemptuous glance, then actually winked at Esperanza.

Later, when Esperanza cleared away the coffee things and brought the liqueurs, he was sitting in an alcove with his arm around the woman's naked back, his free hand toying with the necklace at her throat.

Esperanza scorned her more than ever and thought of poor Marta, who really loved Caldwell, then hated her employer also.

The months passed. Madero had long since come in as President. Luis haunted the War Office again, but with no better success.

Esperanza became more and more worried about grandmother, who was growing feebler. Now she could scarcely get Luis' breakfast; sometimes Luis had to attend to her.

A new worry came. Caldwell announced he was taking Winifred to a nursing home in the United States, then would return to Mexico with his wife. He wanted Esperanza to go along. She knew all of Winifred's needs.

But even though it were only for a month, Esperanza could not leave her loved ones. Caldwell painted the delights of the trip, promised her many things, also her job when she got back.

But Esperanza could not be persuaded.

Marta came over constantly to make arrangements for the trip and to buy what was necessary. Esperanza was not surprised accidentally to come upon her, crying.

Marta daubed at her eyes and sharply ordered Esperanza to attend to various things. Esperanza understood.

Caldwell left with Winifred. Esperanza was out of a job again.

XXIV

Thanks to Marta, Esperanza next went to work for a Mexican family in the Colonia Santa María. Here Esperanza only got eighteen pesos a month, and though this was good for a Mexican family, she received none of the consideration of her former employer. There were only three people, Señora Laura Navarro y Negrete, Widow of Sotomayor (all this went on her visiting cards), and her two sons, Antonio, aged sixteen and Lucas, aged eighteen. But the widow, who was a breast-beating holy woman who spent every possible free moment on her knees at home or in the church, tried to work Esperanza like a dray horse, making her do everything. She kept her scrubbing, washing and cooking from dawn till late at night.

Although there was a decent servant's room, Esperanza and Rosa had to sleep on the floor in a murky cubby-hole under the front stairs. For weeks Esperanza's bones ached painfully.

The younger son, like his mother, was very religious, but Lucas

was a wastrel, a coarse, heavy-set ugly type. He always stared at Esperanza morbidly, like some beast of prey ready to pounce.

One night—he had had several drinks—he tried to kiss her.

She fought him off and escaped, panting and furious. Her dress was slightly torn; his face was badly scratched. But for Luis and her grandmother she would have quit then and there. Even so, she expected to lose her job.

But Lucas did not dare tell his mother. From then on, he gazed at Esperanza malevolently and ordered her around brutally.

Fortunately Luis got a job which seemed permanent—check-weighing in a warehouse. Esperanza, who wanted to make grandmother's last days more comfortable, was only too glad to quit her own job.

Señora Navarro was very nasty at Esperanza for leaving, called her an ungrateful slut and tried to deduct part of her wages.

Esperanza quietly insisted on her rights.

The woman's abuse subsided into sputtering.

Money in hand, Esperanza was tempted to tell the señora off properly, but merely went off with set lips without a farewell.

Luis was overjoyed, grandmother too, to have her home all the time again. So thoughtful and gentle was he now that it was almost like a honeymoon. Security and self-respect had made him less moody. The old scars were healing.

He still wanted to get back to Amecameca, but hated to face his former followers. Having no money, it was now impossible to take land on shares, nor could he get his former job back.

Esperanza also wanted to get away from the city and their two dark little rooms. Her being clamored for the free outdoors of her girlhood. One night she woke up with the smell of fresh growing corn in her nostrils. City life seemed disconnected, without vital importance, a dull hopelessness. But here they were—tied.

Winter hung on late. The nights were still very cold. Several times the temperature dropped down below freezing. Their rooms were so damp and sunless they all caught the grippe. Grandmother developed a bad bronchial cough she could not shake off.

One night she coughed her way into the other world.

They folded her thin hands over the bones of her body—there was almost no flesh—and spent a few pennies on white-and-purple relief candles for her, and gave a few pesos to Father Fernando.

At the last, she had been practically blind. Death was much better for her—so Esperanza consoled herself.

But after that their rooms were emptier. Esperanza found herself listening to the deathly stillness of them and was glad when noises from the patio—crying babies or barking dogs—would drift in. Often she would clasp little Rosa in her arms, and tears, for no explicable reason, would run down her cheeks. She became listless. Her sad thoughts were just a vague gray mist of something lost. Pepe was gone. Grandmother was gone. And where was José? Was he alive or dead?

A new country neighbor moved in next door—an Indian woman with two children, a dumpy but energetic little soul who contrived all sorts of ways to survive, selling in the market, making leather sandals, embroidering and weaving *fajas*—bright sashes—and other things on a homemade loom.

Her weaving interested Esperanza, and she got Luis to build a loom like it and set to work herself.

Her first attempts were laughable, but soon she got the knack.

Her time now filled to better advantage, she became more contented, though this stimulation of her creative faculties made her all the more eager to get back to the country. More and more she dreamed of life in Milpa Verde.

XXV

One day on Avenida Hidalgo, Luis ran into Rufo again. The former majordomo was plunging along, bullet head sunk between his shoulders, long arms swinging.

Rufo pulled Luis into the Nuevo Mundo saloon for a drink. "Just the man I want to see."

Rufo, it seemed, had become a ramrod in the Liberal Party supporting Madero. "Why don't you capitalize on your personal following around Amecameca? You can really help us."

Luis shook his head. "My nose is to the grindstone. I've a wife and a baby and no money."

Rufo held back his head in amused scorn, screwed up one eye and spat.

"I'm telling you. Go up to Amecameca. Talk to your people. Get a club started. In a few months we're holding a big convention here. Come back as a delegate. Support me. Then you'll be in line for a really good job. I'll get you on the payroll and give you expense money. Is it a deal?"

In a few weeks Rufo kept his promise.

Luis quit his warehouse job and hurried home to tell Esperanza they were going up to Amecameca. He concealed the fact of Rufo's aid.

She flung her arms around his neck happily. "You see, things always work out."

Esperanza got all their things ready. What she did not take she left with María Teresa.

The witch-woman gave her a few presents to take to Milpa Verde friends and patted Esperanza's arm affectionately. "Your life is really just beginning now," she said, in a prophetic tone. "I see a great sorrow, but also a great light."

A faraway look came into Bobo's eyes. "It is better in Milpa Verde than here in the city. Will you see the big stone idol? Soon he will want smoking hearts again." He laughed.

Lorenzo gave her a warm parting embrace.

The feel of her own breasts against his excited her far beyond friendly sentiments.

He held her hands affectionately and gazing into her eyes, said in a low tone. "Destiny brought us together—you remember—in jail; destiny will reunite us somewhere, sometime, in freedom."

She shivered, half frightened.

She went off, thinking what a queer trio, María Teresa, Bobo, Lorenzo, always living on the fringe of dark mystery. Her own life was eaten up by purely practical problems.

She also said good-bye to Matilda, now working in a soap factory. Matilda also was wistful when she heard Esperanza was going home . . .

Amecameca . . .

For about a week, she and Luis lived in the rattle-trap *Sacro Monte* Hotel, then took the very house with colored wheel windows, where Esperanza had slaved. No one could tell her where her former mistress had gone.

In the market Esperanza found old acquaintances and chatted lengthily about their experiences in the revolution. Most had kept the even tenor of their ways.

Vamos de Nuevo was boarded up. Esperanza wondered what might have happened to Elena.

Esperanza ran into Arnulfo, the hair on his peaked head wispiest, his eyebrows like ruffled hay. Whimsically he admitted

life was less a strain without María Teresa's constant hocus-pocus.

Gerónimo drifted in. Wry and hard and cunning now, he had become a muleteer, buying salt and other necessities to trade in remote villages. He had acquired the muleteers' free and easy swagger, broad red-sash, knife stuck in the side.

Another day, going up Sacro Monte, at the turn of the red-stone stairs, Esperanza bumped into Toño, bedecked as usual, on horseback.

"*Ola!* My little chicken?" he called out familiarly, and expressed his gratitude to her that she had saved him from being shot.

They gossiped about Madero and María Teresa and "the blessed revolution."

It soon got around that Luis was the new political ramrod in the district. Their house buzzed with comings and going, people of all types—ranchers, Indians, tradesmen, politicians, army officers. The judge, now an ardent Madero supporter, and candidate for mayor, frequently oozed blandly in through the door, always prepared for a long winded harangue.

The bandy-legged worm-eaten sheriff, still strutted about with his tin star and was also on "the right side" now.

"As for the judge," Luis told Esperanza, "I should have shot him when he showed up at the hacienda that rainy night. Now I have to play ball with him. But I'm really getting the peons with us. Madero will have to carry out his agrarian program. When he does, he will be invincible.

The Zapatista agrarians were still up in arms. A few months previous Zapata had swept into luxurious Popo Park and had burned all the buildings. But according to Luis, the Indian rebel merely wanted to give the people land and justice and schools. If Madero carried out his promises, Zapata would have no reason for fighting. Peace would come to the land.

Esperanza also talked of these things with Father Mateo, who now had a small church in Amecameca, though he hoped soon to be able to go back to Milpa Verde and adjoining villages where he had a freer hand. His face had lost smoothness. Wrinkles had crept in.

Strangely enough, he too had now become an ardent partisan of Madero, of whom he used to say such shocking things. Zapata

now was the terrible menace; he had murdered or driven out priests, burned churches, violated altars.

But Luis told Esperanza that the priests always took the side of the landlords against the people.

Once Esperanza, laden with flowers, fruit, ribbons and other gifts, went with Rosa out to see her uncle Pablo, her aunt Petra, and the three children on Rosales.

A droll grin of glad surprise opened Pablo's big flat face. "*Ola!* Every bird comes back to its nest!" he cried.

Petra rushed out, wiping her hands on her dress, clucking like a hen with chickens.

Guadalupe was the happiest of all. Now nearly seventeen, she had turned out much prettier than Esperanza had expected, also more coquettish and restless.

Eagerly she asked about everything in Amecameca and Mexico City. "Oh, if only I could go to those places!" was her repeated plaint to Esperanza.

Antonia, now five, was stolid like her parents, or at least like Petra. Undemonstrative, she did not seem very bright.

But Pablo, Jr., with two added years, had become a strong, alert, little fellow, though still shy. He kept saying, "Aw, shucks!" when Esperanza praised him.

They all exclaimed over Rosa. Petra was purple with joy, and Guadalupe held the baby close to her with a romantic maternal expression.

They had all survived fairly well through the whole stress of the revolution—right in their little hut on the river. Corn now was several feet high among the rocks of their sloping land. She congratulated her uncle on his perseverance.

He grinned again. "It's tough land, but we've made the most of it. No matter how early one gets up, one can't make the day-break come sooner."

He was planning, he said, to take over her grandparents' hut on Magdalena; then, if José, since he had the rights, was willing, he hoped to exchange it for Clemente's place.

Pain clouded her face at mention of José. "But what about Clemente?" she asked.

"Haven't you heard? Old Clemente followed his wife to the grave. I can do things with Clemente's place. It has good fruit, and I can grow alfalfa. I'd be better off than here. Of course, Esperanza, you'd always have a home there."

Good old soul! . . . She patted his arm.

With Guadalupe, she went to pick prickly pears. Again the younger girl, when not hopping around after a butterfly or dashing excitedly to the next plant, plied her with a thousand excited questions about Mexico City and the life there.

Esperanza asked Petra to let Guadalupe come down to Amecameca for a while.

Guadalupe danced all over the place at the prospect, but Petra shook her head. "We need her just now with the crop coming on."

Guadalupe pouted.

Esperanza went back through the gathering twilight to Amecameca with a warm, happy feeling.

More and more absorbed in all the activities of the little town—household duties, care of Rosa, marketing, talking to her neighbors, visiting shrines, enjoying the volcanoes, noting the change of the weather, Esperanza felt more spiritually completed than she had for many a moon. The homely events rippled through her peacefully.

Despite Amecameca's sad brooding fatalism, during the brighter morning hours, it had vivacity, joyousness. The sun was keen. The icy mountain streams gurgled down from the volcanoes and rippled happily through the very streets. Long trains of burros came jingling and braying down from the heights, dragging big timbers, or staggering beneath sacks of brimstone from Popo's crater. Bent Indians dog-trotted all day with hundred-kilo sacks of charcoal strapped to back and brow. The lanes echoed with the yodel of muleteers. And the stones echoed the patter of sandaled feet—how often this made her remember José, then a knife of sorrow would cut through her.

Frequently she went up to Sacro Monte, especially when Luis was seeing people out on the ranches.

In a cave half way up the hill at the first church was, perhaps, buried holy Fray Valencia, one of the first fathers to come to the New World. After making her way up the stone steps with proper obeisance to the twelve stations, Esperanza often gazed upon the spot he was supposed to lie and felt then a mysterious transmission of holiness and strength. Once it was told he resurrected a child that it might be baptized before dying. Esperanza had no doubt but that it would be well to have the holy friar's

good will in case any illness should overtake Rosa, and at the first sign of a colic or cold, she rushed up the holy hill.

Luis was so busy, she saw little of him. But, freed from immediate financial worries, something of a leader again, engaged in work he enjoyed, he recovered self-assurance; he was hale and happy and kinder now. It seemed as if her dream of rebuilding their lives was at last working out. The future looked bright. Never since before the revolution had she been happier.

In due time he held a meeting in the town hall—a river of sombreros flowed into the shabby building. To please him, Esperanza attended. She should set an example. Women, he said, also had rights now; they should learn to use them.

At first Esperanza felt out of place, but in the back row sat a dozen toil-worn peasant women, wrapped mummy-like in their blue rebozos.

Soon she was thrilled to see Luis sitting up importantly at the flag-draped table in his leather ranch costume, a red bandanna about his neck. Behind the table was a big picture of Madero.

There were speeches by the judge and a congressman in typical cream-colored suit with leather buttons, bright silk shirt, horsehair belt and pearl-handled revolver. The rest were peons who had shown leadership; they got up in their cheap white cotton trousers, and several spoke eloquently if not grammatically.

Luis gave the closing talk, for Esperanza the best and clearest. He promised that the Liberal Party would demand lands for the peasants.

He was named delegate to the big Mexico City convention.

All too soon for Esperanza, she and Luis were on their way back.

They got much better quarters—on Zarco street.

Esperanza looked up her friends, María Teresa and Lorenzo, Matilda, took a little gift to Señora de la Selva, saw Marta.

Marta was jaunty—a new reckless half happy note in her. Caldwell, she said, had come back, without his wife, and was now living on Balderas street near the Ciudadela arms factory.

Had he and Marta at last become lovers, Esperanza wondered?

Esperanza went to see him.

"Well, well!" he cried, with curt joviality. "Want a job? Josefina has gone back to Cuatla—too damp for her old bones here."

Esperanza thanked him and told how Luis was getting ahead politically.

"Glad to hear it!" boomed Caldwell. But he pushed out his lower lip skeptically. "Tell him to watch his step. Madero can't last. No government that doesn't enjoy the full support of the United States can endure in Mexico. Madero will crumble soon. You'll see."

Esperanza left, uncomfortably feeling that he might be right, but Luis merely laughed it off as absurd.

Several times, Rufo came to the house. Though he apologized profusely to her for his previous conduct, she could not forgive what he had done to her, to Luis, to José, still absent, perhaps dead. She made a pretense of cordiality, but she had been bitter ever since she had learned that their present good fortune depended on the generosity of such a man. Luis' nobility, she again thought, was coupled with some weakness and lack of pride, or he would have no traffic with Rufo.

Politically things soon looked rocky. Revolt was again cracking the country. The agrarian program, Luis told her, would have to be held up until peace was restored. Madero could not be disturbed at such a moment. These were Rufo's orders.

"Then you won't be able to fulfill the promises you made to the people in Amecameca!" exclaimed Esperanza.

"A temporary delay. 'Back Madero' has become the cry. Our hands are tied. If a rebel landlord movement like this one of Orozco in the North wins, we're lost. Besides I agreed to back Rufo."

"But if Zapata, the peasant leader in the South, wins?"

Luis was silent.

Esperanza argued hotly that to go ahead with the land program would strengthen the government, pacify the agrarians, and bring united support to put down the landlord revolt. The landlords wouldn't be with the government in any case.

Luis was nettled by her argument. He repeated that he had to follow Rufo's leadership.

Luis, Esperanza again felt, was weak and compromising. In a way, though, his association with Rufo meant that the old wound in his heart because of Joaquín was healed—for that at any rate she was glad. More and more often now he noticed Rosa, played with her, bought little toys. He had taken the girl completely into his own life.

Rosa, growing plumper and stronger every day, could walk and talk. The child was Esperanza's greatest comfort, for Luis was busy night and day with political juntas, speech-making, lobbying. Often he did not get home even for meals.

Just as Caldwell predicted, the political situation, instead of improving, became more unstable.

One morning Esperanza heard the rattle of musketry. Several hours later, Luis came running home excited.

There had been a bloody jamboree right in front of the Palace itself, cannon rattling, cavalry clattering . . . Surprise treachery!

"You know how careless Madero is," said Luis. "Every morning he rides to the Palace alone—or with only an aide—on his white horse, no precautions whatsoever. This morning they were laying for him. How he got out of that firing alive is a miracle. I was just turning into the plaza from Calle Brazil when it all started."

"You!" cried Esperanza.

"Yes. And there came Madero on his white horse right into the hail of bullets.

"He didn't hesitate a second, just rode straight on head up. God, he was majestic! He went right in among those who planned to kill him and got them all cheering for him!"

"He'd be more sensible to have a proper guard," said Esperanza. This incident was merely an evil omen for worse to come. "Things are breaking up," she insisted.

"No! No!" cried Luis. "Everything will work out. Why what happened this morning will make Madero a hero for the whole country."

For Luis every cloud seemed to have a silver lining. His own prospects were never better. He expected to be put up for Congress from the Amecameca district. Soon now they would move to a better house—more sun and air for the baby.

But Esperanza built no false hopes. Unrest, disaster were ahead. María Teresa was also full of dark forebodings.

Near the palace, Esperanza ran into Lorenzo. He walked down Tacuba street with her. His company filled her with a strange zest, but acute embarrassment, as though she were doing something wrong.

"Your husband is becoming quite a politician," he remarked. "But Madero is going to crash. Everybody knows it. If you play politics, you'd better find a good cushion to land on."

"You are right. But Luis can't see it."

He stopped and took her hands impulsively—"When you need a friend"—and he looked into her eyes.

His hands, his glance, his manner was caressing. Again she felt the same physical thrill and distrust.

Time slid by. Luis told her he had found just the right place to move to. "It will be perfect for Rosa."

But that very day new trouble popped out of a clear sky. Félix Díaz, nephew of the former dictator, conspired with treacherous military elements and seized the Ciudadela, the arms factory in the heart of the city.

Firing began, then bombardment. A terrible duel, later known as "the Tragic Ten Days," began between the Ciudadela and the National Palace, where Minister of War Huerta held the reins for the Madero government.

From the Zarco flat, Esperanza could hear the roar of cannon. Shells shrieked across the sky. At times the barrage was incessant. The occasional lulls were almost as frightennig as the cannonading.

To Esperanza's great alarm, Luis, despite the firing, had to go out.

When he returned he told her how things were going.

She was worried about Caldwell, whose new apartment was in the line of fire.

The frightened gringos, Luis said, were sleeping in droves on mattresses on the floor in their consulate. "Caldwell's probably there."

The firing dragged on, that day and the next and the next. The Felixistas in the Ciudadela grew bolder, threw out skirmishing lines, finally mounted cannon on the tall Y.M.C.A. building. Occasionally there was bloody street fighting. But mostly it was just constant bombardment, cannon balls, shrieking across the business part of the city, a terrifying uproar.

Luis now had to skirmish for food, getting scarce, for people were afraid to bring their produce into town.

That night the light current was cut off. Fortunately they had a few candles. The flames seemed to jump with the rocking of the cannonading. The windows rattled. The world seemed coming to an end.

"What puzzled me," said Luis, "is that Huerta isn't able to put down that handful in the Ciudadela."

"Perhaps Huerta is betraying the government for his own ends."

"Impossible!" exclaimed Luis. "He'd be betraying himself at the same time."

"Not necessarily. Some treachery is afoot."

The next day Luis came running back to tell Esperanza a three-hour truce had been arranged by the American Embassy.

"You ought to get out into the air a bit. We can have a look at the new house. It's on Arquitectos street."

Leaving Rosa with a neighbor, she and Luis set out.

The city seemed deserted, strangely still after the bombardment, the silence frightening.

They followed along San Juan de Letrán, across from the unfinished boarded-up National Theatre, then down Juárez along the tree-shaded Alameda. All the stores had their iron shutters down, as on Sunday, but many other things were normal. A sprinkling cart dragged along. A street sweeper was clearing away accumulated refuse. Indian vendors, chained by habit, stood nonchalantly by their little portable fruit and candy stores, waiting for customers who did not come.

Esperanza and Luis had gotten almost to the semi-circular Juárez monument when a squadron of horse and some infantry swung into the avenue from Balderas street—across from the tall Regis Hotel.

"Rebels!" exclaimed Luis.

Up the avenue behind them sounded another clatter of horse. Red and black federals were sweeping down from the blue-tiled Jockey Club.

"Do you suppose —?" cried Esperanza.

"No danger. Neither side would dare violate a truce called by the American Embassy."

The two columns continued to advance toward each other.

"Strange," remarked Luis.

"Perhaps we'd better cut through the park," suggested Esperanza.

Common sense told her it was wise to get away from where two rival bands were moving about.

"It's all right, I'm sure," persisted Luis. "We can duck behind the monument if necessary."

Hardly were the words out of his mouth than firing began.

"What do you know about that!" he cried, frozen in his tracks.

Esperanza clutched his arm.

The bullets swept up the avenue—a storm of bullets.

The sprinkling-cart horse gave a bellow and thumped over on the pavement, legs kicking. Water spurted from holes in the tank.

People were dashing off in all directions, ducking into doorways, down side streets, scattering wildly across the Alameda. One girl had caught up her thin, silk dress clear to her waist, and screaming at the top of her lungs, was running for all she was worth. An Indian, rushing by with a basket of bread on his head, suddenly lurched. The bread went rolling out into the street-car tracks.

"We're right in the line of fire!" cried Luis. "We've got to get out of this."

He seized Esperanza's arm to propel her behind the monument.

His grip suddenly tightened, then relaxed. He gave a cry and crumpled up by her side.

She dropped down and shook him, unable to believe he had really been shot.

"Luis! Luis!" she cried frantically. "Luis," she shrilled.

He did not answer. His head was limp.

"Tell me you are all right! Tell me!" she gasped, sobbing.

Oblivious to the bullets, she sat down on the sidewalk and took his head and shoulders in her lap.

A street lamp shattered; the glass fell all about them.

She did not notice. Her thoughts swirled . . . he wanted to show me the new apartment . . . more air and light for Rosa . . .

A black caterpillar humped its way along the pave near the grass in the parking.

"Luis!" she cried, clutching at his shirt near the collar.

His eyes fluttered. His lips moved.

He was alive!

Faintly he mumbled. "Child's play . . . cowardice . . . We should have kept on fighting . . . I knew it . . . I have been fooling myself . . . Oh, Esperanza, I have been fooling myself." A great sob came out of his throat. "I was fooling myself —"

His head jerked, fell limp from the neck. His eyes gave one wide open stare of agony. His mouth stayed open, but rigid, as though words were trying to come out.

A red stain grew on the front of his shirt.

Esperanza, horrified, tore it open.

The blood was gushing from a wound in his chest.

She stuffed her handkerchief into it.

But in no time the bit of cloth was soaked with blood. The blood kept flowing and flowing.

She tried to staunch it with her rebozo. It was no use.

In her helplessness, she looked about her at the bullet-whipped trees. The stately buildings across the way seemed to reel. Ever after, she remembered a bearded face peering over the roof of a three-story building, staring at her, an expressionless face, as though Jehovah himself were sitting there in implacable judgment.

Luis' body stiffened. The last trace of color went out of his cheeks. Life ebbed away completely. He was dead.

Esperanza held him there in her arms, tears coursing down her cheeks.

The bullets were still whining. Clipped leaves and twigs fell about her. Cavalry were clattering, sabres clashing.

But she knew nothing of what was going on right around her. Everything but Luis were shut out. She saw only the head of her beloved.

She closed his staring, meaningless eyes. Her hot tears fell on his face.

She finally came to her senses.

The skirmish had ceased—now the dull boom of the cannon from the National Palace and the Y.M.C.A. had started up again. Save for a few patrolling federals at one end, the street was utterly empty.

What should she do? She did not want to leave Luis. But she could not move him without help. No one was about.

She sat on and on there, frozen with uncertainty and terror, now and then weeping.

A thousand thoughts crashed through her brain . . . Life without Luis . . . Blank emptiness stretched ahead . . . Rosa . . . But even Rosa meant nothing just then.

Her tears fell and fell . . . She kissed his cold lips. She smoothed his fine dark hair.

"Hello! What's this?" An officer and half a dozen soldiers came along.

The officer bent down to examine Luis. Esperanza noticed only the large gold signet ring on his hairy hand.

"Dead! Stone dead!" said the officer, laconically. "Are you his wife?"

She nodded through her tears.

"Where do you live? Hm, rather far."

But he ordered his men to pick up the body. "Take him wherever she wants."

He strode on with a clank of his useless gilt sword before she could thank him.

PART III



FALSE GODS

III

FALSE GODS

XXVI

ESPERANZA, little Rosa swung in a rebozo on her back and mounted on a bony horse she had rented in Amecameca, climbed past a tile-roofed settlement, clustered about a church, and wound up through cactus and stone lanes and fields of corn into a pine grove with half-decayed pieces of bark and splintery needles to a trail along the more flinty barren hillside where grew mostly cactus and magueyes, now and then a false-pepper tree with glistening red berries. She was on her way back to Milpa Verde.

Rosa, on her back, was quiet. The child, fascinated, watched the world go by, a new strange world that bobbed and bobbed—hills, rocks, trees, and an unbroken sky.

But Esperanza did not notice much. Her thoughts were still with her dead. Fate had squeezed her heart so cruelly in its iron hand that life itself had almost stopped for her. She moved through the days in a fog of pain, like a prisoner dragging a heavy ball and chain. Some things she did not even see. Recent though her tragedy, some things she couldn't remember at all.

After that hour of terror when Luis died, the only sharp image that remained was the flash of sunlight on the polished brass buckle on the belt of some policeman on some corner.

For the life of her she could never recollect just how she and the soldiers had gotten Luis' body to the flat. The acid of her pain had eaten away so much.

For the moment she gave up the struggle to remember and looked at the familiar things about her on the lonely road back to Milpa Verde, back to the village of her childhood.

She crossed a ridge, running down from the Smoke Mountain, like a finger from a hand, and turned at a remembered cross with faded flowers. The fresh scent of high forests tingled in her nostrils from a slight breeze. She passed on down through

a meadow of fresh grass and odorous bushes, then across a little stream, the water foaming against the belly of her horse.

She breathed deeply as the animal stopped there to quench his thirst. She could feel the movement of his almost fleshless ribs as he sucked in the water.

That day of Luis' death! . . . The cannon—how they had shaken the house, the windows of the room where she sat with her dead!

Only when pressing duty had called her from a spell of wild, empty weeping, had something of reality returned to her.

She had had to get him buried. She had gotten up and had dried her eyes and had gone out into the stricken city.

All undertaking establishments were closed. Poor folk didn't use them anyway. But the coffin street, to one side of the Palace, was exposed to the firing. The dull boom echoed across the city worse than ever.

She had started to make a wide detour, then had decided to go as directly as possible. If her time to die had come, no precautions would save her.

She walked from Zarco up Tacuba street. Near the big plaza and the Palace, a cannon ball crashed into a roof; dust and splinters spurted up.

In the big vacant square, its trees whipped to shreds, the cathedral was silent—no joyous bells of victory; its gray stones were gouged with shots.

Puffs of smoke burst from the Palace roof where cannon answered cannon. Balls thudded on stone walls. Buildings crashed. It was all a dream, not real. Down Moneda street dashed a squadron of horse in mad gallop.

Further across the plaza, newsboys gleefully chased after half-spent rolling cannon balls, calculating just when they dared put out their bare feet and stop them. One boy was sent rolling. Surely he must have broken his leg!

But he jumped up laughing and proud. Two newsies were excitedly laying a wager on two balls rolling near together as to which would go farther.

Reaching the Thieves' Market without mishap, she hurried on to Capuchinas, turned left into the narrow coffin street.

Her heart sank with vexation. All the little shops were closed. Why? People were dying.

But on the far corner, she found an old man in a little cubby-

hole with rows and rows of black and white coffins on his shelves. After considerable haggling, she got a cheap wooden box for the too high price of nine pesos. A cargador carried it home for her, a round-about way, for thirty centavos.

She had no money to buy a graveyard plot. The only place was the potter's field at Dolores cemetery, far out of the city.

Rufo, it occurred to her, would help her, but she would cut off her hand first. After Luis' last words, she felt that Rufo, however much they might have been temporarily aided by him—for his own ends of course—was the malevolent influence that had ruined Luis' life, that had always brought disaster to her and hers. That gorilla-like person was the evil genius of all of them.

Luis should have died in a noble fashion in one of his moments of bravery and conviction, not trapped thus like a rat in a stupid cross-fire.

But suddenly she realized that his death was a symbol of Mexico and its struggle, a symbol of all the actual uncertainties and vacillations. Luis' last efforts had all been, as she saw them now, so futile, so indecisive, so confused. A whole nation was groping, groping its way along some terrible abyss.

Suddenly, once more she heard the running feet of José, running, running—the thud, thud, thud of his sandals down the cactus lane. José! Where was José? Would she ever know? She wanted him now —

Now—here on this rocky road back to Milpa Verde . . .

Without urging from her, Esperanza's horse started up the steep bank of the little stream along a stony gully under alamo trees.

Her thoughts went back to Luis. After getting the coffin she had gone to see a man who had a cart and had gotten him to agree to take the body out to Dolores the next morning for two pesos. She herself had made a little wooden cross, stained it black and carved Luis' name on it.

She went to see Father Fernando, to get him to go out to the cemetery. But he did not want to stir with all the firing going on, and when he found she had only two pesos to give him, he was quite certain he didn't want to go all that distance. But he came to the house, knelt beside Luis, said some prayers and took the two pesos . . .

Bitterness and more bitterness . . .

Now, Esperanza's horse climbed out of the shaded gully into the sun on the plateau.

The bright light across the vast valley made her blink. The mountains towered there, cut so clear and sharp—everything so cruelly defined, so hard. Nothing had any right to be so sharp-edged.

Things certainly had not been clear that night when she had sat alone with Luis' body. Now, once more, the white candles, with molded black floral designs, flickered before her reddened eyes.

Once, out of sheer exhaustion that terrible night, she had fallen asleep in her chair and had had a terrible dream.

Her horse stumbled, and Esperanza and Rosa jerked . . .

The memory of that dream made her jerk, too. How was it that a dream over a dead body could be so much more vivid in her mind than anything else?

In her dream she had been running across the Alameda, lost from Luis. She could see each snippy little bullet as it flew past her, for it would open out its wings like a bumble-bee. Then she felt something drill slowly into her back, drill and drill, buzz and buzz. It drilled painfully into her belly . . . She had been shot . . . She fell crumpled in a clump of bushes. A doctor, with a black case, hurried along, stopped. She was too much in pain even to look at him. Instead of bending over her, he merely stood there a long time. "Tend to me," she pleaded, writhing. But he gazed at her contemptuously . . . cruelly . . . With great effort, she turned her head. . . . It was Joaquín, smiling down in cold triumph . . . "Go way," she screamed. "Go way!" Then a tall man in shabby clothes and battered black case appeared . . . "Tend to me," she cried piteously. He knelt down and his touch was gentle and sure . . . A thrill went through her very bowels . . . She opened her eyes . . . It was the sleek, dark-haired companion of María Teresa—Lorenzo Romero . . . She felt his hands . . . His caress was sweet and kind. She thrilled again and felt herself in his power forever and ever.

She moaned. "Lie still," he commanded. He took out a long wire ramrod, put a swab on the end, and ran it clear through her with a twisting motion, right through her bowels. Out came blood, mucus, bits of intestine . . . She knew then she would die . . . But he merely smiled and put his hand on her belly,

caressing her, soft, slow. . . . Her body shook happily. . . . He said confidently she would live. She knew she would live.

She had wakened that night of death with a shock, deathly chill, her muscles aching from her abnormal position in her chair. Her dream had been so vivid that awake she had felt her abdomen for the wound, thrilled once more from the dark man's touch, his investigatory caressing fingers, and had despised herself.

The candles blinked at her, throwing dancing shadows. She replaced several.

Dawn came at last, dull, misty, cold—cold to the marrow. Another bitter day had to be faced.

Quite early, pock-marked Matilda had happened in. At once she ran to tell María Teresa, who, with Bobo, came over, puffing a bit—she had grown more portly.

They—her old friends from Milpa Verde—walked with her all the way to Dolores, six long miles.

Esperanza knelt over the newly-made mound, her hot tears dropping on the fresh earth. So this was the end, all so swift, so brutal, so distorted, their love so unfulfilled, their happiness so cruelly brief! Life seemed growing into a belated honeymoon, then he was gone—in a flash. She did not even have a child by him.

Esperanza's tears fell now as her horse jogged along, up a little trail of black, volcanic sand between jagged black rocks out of which grew only a few sharp cactus balls.

It had taken hours for her, the two women and the melancholy dwarf to get back from the cemetery.

It was already night, and cold. In the poor districts, they had looked in at bright open doorways, folks living in hovels right against the street. There they were with their cluttered dirty belongings, wives, husbands, grandfolk, aunts, uncles, broods of children; and even though the cannon thundered and their bellies were half empty, they had companionship in their misery.

But she was alone. Only Rosa.

Getting home, how overwhelmed she had been by the emptiness of the flat!

She had had only a few pesos. In less than ten days the rent was due. And it had been so difficult to get food. The stark days of terror lived again in her mind as she jogged now along the black plateau.

The morning following the burial, she had walked clear to

Guadalupe. She had prayed for a long time in the church, prayed for Rosa, for food, for help. At the Sacred Well, she had drawn up a copper bucket of holy water. She had rubbed it behind her ears and had made the sign of the cross with it. . . . She remembered that clearly.

In the market she had managed to buy a little corn at triple price.

After that there was no food to be had. Desperate, Esperanza had gone to see Marta out in Santa María. They had very little food either, but Marta had given her a few beans.

Marta had lost weight, looked sad, wistful, but more beautiful.

Esperanza had asked her about Caldwell. Marta's lips quivered. "He left yesterday for the States again—to get his wife. Yes, little Winifred, he says, is well—in a nursing home."

Then she burst out: "Why, why didn't he let me keep the child? I wanted to." Her lips quivered.

How strange was the love of woman, Esperanza thought! Marta, loving Caldwell, not being able to have him, wished to burden herself with an illegitimate child of his by another woman. But even that was better than having your loved one dead.

Again Esperanza's tears fell.

How frightened those days, she had trudged the city over again and again to find food for Rosa! She had even gotten near the dangerous zone again.

In the main plaza, she had seen flat cars heaped with dead in indescribable confusion, like so much rubbish, people of all classes, shoeless Indians, well-dressed men. They had been picked up dead and dumped there. No one had had time to identify them, to get them to their families. Some of the Indians, a bystander told her, had died of starvation.

A great fear for Rosa had clutched Esperanza's heart. Surely people did not just starve. Surely God did not permit that. But there were the bodies. Dead people. Poor people—all dead.

But on the other side of the plaza was the cathedral. God was there. Surely He would not permit her to starve, or allow more people to die. Had she known more history, she would have known that millions of people had died just that that cathedral might be planted there on the Aztec ruins.

The bystander had told her the bodies would be taken out

of the city, set fire to with gasoline, and be buried in trenches. She had turned away in horror.

Food! There was none to be had.

She would steal for Rosa's sake. But there was no food she could steal.

XXVII

Returning home empty handed, Esperanza had run into María Teresa. The medicine woman clasped her in her arms.

"What terrible times!—God is punishing his people—" a dozen stock phrases that folk use in time of universal catastrophe.

María Teresa insisted that Esperanza come on home with her.

As they walked into the big patio, Bobo and his yellow dog rushed up. The dwarf hugged her and danced around excitedly, contorting his face and wriggling his hands.

"He has been unusually nervous since the bombardment," explained María Teresa.

"The dead!" he cried. "Only the dead will rule! Only the dead! A dead man with a bottle and much gold braid will rule!" he cried.

Esperanza thought of General Huerta, notorious drunkard, at the moment defending the Palace and Madero's government, and recalled the fears she had expressed to Luis that he might be planning treachery.

Lorenzo had been home.

"Esperanza!" he had cried sympathetically, taking her hands gently. "María Teresa told me what has happened. I could not go to the funeral. I'm terribly sorry about it all."

Tears had come into Esperanza's eyes. She had trembled violently at the touch of his hands.

He had put his arm about her and led her to a chair. A current had flowed from his arm through her whole body. She had trembled still more violently. She trembled again now as she recalled . . .

She pulled her horse up suddenly, trying to remember just where she now was.

Milpa Verde was not so far now. From that next spiny ridge, she would be able to get a glimpse of its roofs and the dome of San Benito. A feeling, almost of peace, pervaded her. She took up the reins again.

Once more her thoughts picked up the thread of memory.

How many times she had rolled and unrolled that thread, day after day, during these brief bitter weeks!

Again she thought of Lorenzo, the touch of his arm, her dream.

She had, that day at María Teresa's, forced herself to look at him clearly—so tall and dark, his sleek, black hair, his pallid complexion. His glance, bent on her intently, had dominated her completely. It had made her desperately nervous.

Then Bobo had come sniggering in.

María Teresa made Esperanza eat something and gave her a little food for Rosa. Esperanza felt that her prayer to God there in the plaza had not been in vain—which was not quite fair to María Teresa.

The medicine woman promised to come over the following morning and bring more food.

She had been true to her word. Also she had brought bad news. Bobo had disappeared.

"He got more and more restless. Yesterday afternoon when I called him to eat, he didn't answer. He was not there all night. I'm afraid he's gone away. I hope nothing happens to him."

It was odd, thought Esperanza now, as her horse began climbing a hill, how one could telescope a universe of pain, days and days of misery and trouble into a few brief moments as one sat on a horse in the middle of a stream, as one plodded along a lonely road.

Would peace never return to her heart?

Peace, certainly, had returned temporarily to Mexico City. Life revived as after a bad dream. A treacherous pact, Lorenzo had told Esperanza, had been signed between Madero's War Minister, Huerta, and rebel Félix Díaz, right in the American Embassy.

A semblance of normality had been restored, and Esperanza thereafter had gone out every week to put flowers on Luis' grave.

Only too soon had there been more furor. A *golpe de estado* by Huerta. Madero prisoner. The drunken Indian general, in whom "the Savior" had reposed so much confidence, had seated himself on the cactus throne through black treachery and the blessings of the American Ambassador. He would wade in blood to keep his ill-gotten post. . . . But again the cathedral bells had tolled their heavy sound across the flat-roofed city.

One day soon, María Teresa came over again. "Have you heard? They've killed Madero. They shot him in the back—" Her eyes were full of tears as though she had lost a personal friend.

Esperanza had sat down in a heap. She remembered the brave little President going along the Paseo, tilting his derby hat, click clock, click clock, all the people cheering themselves hoarse. But somehow, Madero's death made Luis' death take on greater nobility.

Now, Esperanza drew a deep breath. Here she was, leaving the city of disaster, on her way home, if she could be said to have any home at all. But, anyway, the smell of the countryside was good—the slight tang of the volcanic dust, the odor of yucca and mint and sage-brush. All Esperanza had wanted all these weary weeks was to get out of the city that had robbed her of Luis.

It had been a *via crucis*. She had thought she would never get away. For a time she had taken a cheap room, all her furnishings in a clutter scarcely allowing her to turn around. She had eked out an existence in various menial ways. "I must get back to Amecameca; I must get back—or die."

Over and over again she had repeated that to herself. The fields had called her. The growing corn had called her. Only in Milpa Verde could her spirit be made whole again.

But months had passed, weary dragging months. Even Rosa had grown ill-tempered. The only break in the monotony, and that had not helped her drooping spirits, had been her weekly visit to Luis' grave.

Then one day, through María Teresa, Esperanza had learned that her Uncle Pablo and his family had installed themselves in Clemente's house. He had said she would always have a home there. The very day she had learned he had moved, a weight fell from her. She had decided to go.

How her spirits had at once soared! Just the thought of being in the country again had made her almost happy. She had hugged little Rosa with joy. "We'll go out and see the chickens and the pigsies and all the rest of it."

She had hurried to sell her miserable belongings for fifteen pesos. Some she left with María Teresa. She bought a few presents and on a bright, pulsing morning—spring was in full glory, she had taken a cab to San Lorenzo station.

The great plaza, so recently the scene of bloody carnage, where she had seen dead folk piled on flat cars that day of her despair, this day of her departure, was dozing under the morning sun.

Peons lounged around the ragged park. The eucalyptus trees in front of the cathedral swayed gently; a golden cupola on a distant church gleamed brightly. The Palace stood, bulky as Cortés had planned it, sealed up in eternal mystery, hiding all its centuries of crime and violence and glory and power. Sentries paced before its big portals, bayonets on their guns, much as they had done for nearly a hundred years. Behind these ramparts now sat bloody Huerta, the drunken Indian, ruling for his brief murderous hour, all of Mexico's destinies.

Esperanza had taken a seat second class, her bundles about her, and had swung little Rosa around from her back where she had been riding serenely in mama's rebozo. Esperanza's eyes had brimmed with sudden tears as she noticed one corner still showing the stain from trying to staunch Luis' wound. She had put it to her lips half weeping, then had stared resolutely out of the window.

Now, as Esperanza neared the ridge where she would get a glimpse of Milpa Verde, her interest in the landscape about her revived. She grew calmer and a feeling almost of reassurance took hold of her.

Every step of the way Esperanza knew like the palm of her hand. Many a river-worn rock roused long dim memories, memories older than those with which she had just been torturing herself. . . . Here was a tree where she and a childhood playmate had carved the outlines of a bird. She could not resist getting off her horse to see if it were still there.

Yes, high up, a foot above her head, was a scar of interlaced welts, looking not like a bird but some pulpy insect, just a heavy knot, a wound on the tree.

Just a knot! That was what things became—hard scars. Life went on growing, and hard memories remained of all the happiness and tenderness, all the trials, quarrels, violences. But there were new, green leaves at the top. Was that also true of people?

She mounted and went on. For no reason at all, she thought of silkworm cocoons hanging from the underside of shaggy trees, and an old stump bored full of shiny cylinders by bumblebees. Childhood memories—all so far away—little bruises on the trunk of life.

The sun had grown very warm. The face of the cliff they were passing, glowed. The dust rose chokingly from the horse's feet. The rains were mostly late this year. Corn had withered.

Rosa, troubled by the heat and flies, woke up hungry, achingly, sleepy, hot, uncomfortable. They began going downhill, and the jolting made her still more uncomfortable. She whimpered, finally cried.

Esperanza, living with her own thoughts, paid no attention. Finally she covered the child's face and pulled a corner of the rebozo over her own head to protect herself from the sun.

Soon, through half-closed eyes, for the light was dazzling over the silvered valley, she could see the gray stone walls of Milpa Verde and above them—the church—clusters of trees.

Esperanza was happy at the sight. Refuge, hope, were closer now.

Here and there the paths crossed solid rock, worn deep and smooth by the age-old passing of sandal-shod feet, by cows, and burros and goats. The steep slopes were criss-crossed with paths and cornfields, irregular in shape because of the rocky outcroppings.

On a knoll, before entering the place, she turned to gaze over Cuatla Valley. The nearer meadows and hills were splotched with golden light. Beyond, the valley melted into the silver haze of distant heights—a ring of gigantic mountains. And Milpa Verde like a golden crown!

She stuck her heels into the nag's side. They moved slowly down along a slate-colored lane of gray, volcanic stones. Here and there vines fell over the walls, softening the harshness; flowers bloomed everywhere. Here and there a tree or maguey plant broke the stone line, or elsewhere the stones had tumbled, giving an air of rural dilapidation, but mostly the fences, everything, were neat and in their places. This filled her with pride. Now and then dogs, with no social sense, popped out of the gateways and barked or snarled with ruffled neck hair and lip-drawn teeth.

They climbed higher into other neat lanes, came out before the yellow church of San Benito.

Rockets were popping into the sky. She had heard them a long time, but so engrossed she had been with her own thoughts or with immediate sights, so elated over her return, she had not

been really conscious of them. She suddenly realized this was Holy Week. How remiss she had been!

Presently she met acquaintances. Their faces lit up with pleasure. Half a dozen times she stopped to pass a few words, but only a few; she was anxious to get on.

And then suddenly she saw Bobo. So he, too, had come back to Milpa Verde!

He loped forward with a happy, "Whooeee!"

"Why did you run off from María Teresa?" demanded Esperanza.

He laughed convulsively. "More smoke!" He laughed more convulsively, then ran along beside her horse.

She zigzagged up another lane that brought her out on the rocky ledge even with the church cupola.

Below, they could see half the town, its slate walls, gray and red-tiled roofs, gardens, trees. Skirting the steep edge of a ravine, she dipped down to reach Pablo's house.

They were not expecting her. No one was about.

But the burro, tethered to a big, fig tree by the side of the adobe outhouse, reassured her. Chickens were scratching about the door. A pig was nosing in the corral.

She went through the cactus and gray stone wall into the yard and called.

Petra poked her big, frowsy head out.

"Esperanza!" she shrilled.

Gathering up her full peasant skirts, she hurried over to embrace her, even before she dismounted.

A bit stiff, Esperanza got off her horse and sat little Rosa down.

Petra caught the child up and kissed her and rocked her to and fro in her strong arms. "How big she is! How healthy!"

Rosa answered by bawling. She was weary unto death.

Esperanza sat her on a big square timber. There the child interested herself watching the chickens.

Presently Pablo, Junior, and a playmate flew over the corral fence as if possessing wings. They dashed up, then grew shy as they gravely shook hands.

"Aren't you glad to see your cousin?" demanded Petra.

He was, but gladder to go dashing with his friend off around the corner again, where they quarreled as boys often do immediately after the strain of any formality.

"And here is little Toña!"

The girl waddled toward her, shook hands and took refuge in Petra's skirt.

Guadalupe danced around the corner of the house and rushed up pell-mell with birdlike cries. She hugged Esperanza joyously. Her enthusiasm and bright girlishness made Esperanza realize vividly how much she herself had changed. Some eternal calmness had crept into her.

Girlhood had gone out of her. But Guadalupe was bubbling with life and spirits.

Pablo lumbered into view and clasped Esperanza with a heavy bear-hug. "When the wedge parts the heart, it must be of the same wood."

"You are a fine old wedge!" said Esperanza.

How clean and tidy his shirt was. Petra was certainly industrious.

Esperanza laid her straw mat down in one corner of the big smoky room. Over it she faithfully put her crucifix and the red float lamp. She was home again.

"We heard about Luis," said Petra gently, and crossed herself.

And that was all that was said of the matter for several days.

XXVIII

Esperanza woke up in her new home to the sound of rockets heralding Good Friday. Pablo and Petra had stirred early, the children soon after—all excited over the fiesta.

Ordinarily Esperanza would have leapt up immediately, for it was already day—late for a Mexican peasant. But after her long hard trip, as the morning was warm, she lay on, curled in her serape, little Rosa breathing evenly by her side. A rich lassitude enveloped her.

The early light sifted into the room—her home she knew not for how long. Above the heavy, gray stone walls, which rose about ten feet, were poles and wattle work and a high thatched roof, unusually steep, for occasionally the rains came down heavily. There were slide-board windows but no chimney, so the stones, walls and thatch had gradually become sooted. The furniture consisted of a few lone benches and low reed-woven chairs and a homemade table.

Presently Rosa woke up. Esperanza hugged and kissed, then

tickled her. Rosa's chortling and kicking made a bright beginning for the day.

Esperanza stretched, got up, shook out her dress, arranged her hair.

Pablo, Junior, watched her with wide eyes while he munched on tacos. Pablo, Senior, unshaven, was chewing in slow, cow-like fashion and said in a sing song: "The first dog gets the bone."

On the porch, with a half gourd, Esperanza scooped water out of the big, red olla to wash her hands and face, then stood entranced, looking at the silver flame on the volcanoes.

Petra had coffee and hot milk ready—a special treat.

Afterwards Esperanza took Rosa out in the backyard. A big limber-branched floripondio tree with white trumpet flowers grew not far from the temascal, the conical adobe bathhouse. Beyond was a corral. Beside the steps were geraniums, petunias, hibiscus and violets in long narrow boxes on stilts, so the plants would not be uprooted by pigs or chickens.

"How nice you have fixed everything up!" she cried to Petra.

The urge to hurry on to the fiesta at San Benito grew stronger. Rockets were popping merrily in the sky with little white puffs. The church bell was ringing, not sonorously, but with the quick, shrill tom-tom strokes liked by the Indian ear, a sound of eagerness that kept up incessantly, for each village boy had to have his turn at jingle making. It was the day of "the three falls" of Christ when carrying the cross. There was to be an enactment of the age-old drama.

Pablo and the boy went on ahead.

Petra hurried to clean up a bit more. "Father Mateo is back!" she cried.

They went up the shelving gray stone lane. Rosa walked a ways, then went bobbing in the rebozo again. Everywhere were little round goat-droppings—an acrid perfume, sensually disturbing, as of something festive, pagan. Fleece and fur clung to the thorns.

At the yellow-pink front of the church, Guadalupe left them for she had a part in the drama.

Little by little they edged their way through the throng to a place just inside the entrance. A few candles flickered solemnly before the black-draped altars, below which were heaps of golden zempaxuchitl flowers. Dusky faces shone with the gleams from hundreds of candles, clutched in bronze hands. The air was heavy

with incense, smoke and cornfed human bodies. The packed congregation was kneeling; the floor was a red and blue sea from closely bunched tunics and serapes as folk waited for the Mass of Passion.

A subtle change had taken place in the dress of the worshippers. The typical male peasant costume still predominated—white cotton "drawers" folded tight about the hips, bloomer-like above the knees, blouses knotted over the belly; but the women's costumes often varied from the old days of pre-Cortés embroidered huipiles and full-puffed skirts, this day bright-hued, poppy-colored, royal blue, yellow. Now there was also recent Mexico City dress, rarely seen here before. One girl, formerly working in the Vamos de Nuevo saloon, had rouged lips, beaded silk dress, and high-heeled red shoes. Only two years ago no such sight would have been seen. The old simple village pattern was breaking up.

Esperanza and Petra crossed themselves with holy water, knelt for a while, then Mass began.

From the apse came the thin clamor of holy music, filed down to sharp Indian monotony, the quarter notes of the Indian scale, wailing freezingly, rising, breaking, sinking, now and then flowing into the richer mood of the long, pure Gregorian intervals.

For two hours the ceremony went on, then Father Mateo, in his black robe, took up the silver cross with its black noose, and led the congregation out into the yard.

There people swarmed on the walls, in the low trees, or squatted in the shade of this modern garden of olives.

Presently little "Ahs!" rippled through the watchers. The holy service began. High on a platform held up by six powerful Indians rode a crude statue of an emaciated Christ, robed in faded purple and carrying a huge pasteboard cross with the aid of a Roman soldier in helmet and armor. The soldier was alive—one of the villagers; he wore a black veil, for who would care to be recognized as the villain who lashed Christ?

The emaciated statue came nearer. Horror and pity made the whole ancient tragedy real to Esperanza; it mingled with her own tragedy, then eased away into inner calm.

Blood from a chaplet of iron thorns streamed down the sickly green face of the statue. The image was manipulated by a long hook in the hands of a boy beneath the draped platform. At the proper moment, he pulled the luckless figure down upon its

nose with a terrific jolt. Between times this same urchin played a weird flute. The drapery parted, and Esperanza saw that it was not a boy at all, but Bobo.

Preceding the float, dressed in outlandish armor and carrying every fashion of medieval weapon, maces, pikes, battle-axes, marched the Roman centurions—one was none other than Gerónimo—in long, colored stockings, silver paper helmets, paper plumes, and long staffs with pasteboard spear points. There went all the historic characters: Judas in a black hat and long black robe and jingling a coin box; Barabás, in a mask with a stupid pink grin, dirty toga falling over one shoulder, on his back a water gourd (beneath this disguise Esperanza recognized Arnulfo); the Jewish constabulary; the soldiers who diced for the seamless robe; the ace-man with a masked dog; the twelve old prophets, their feet duly washed, who had already played their part.

One individual skirled a *matraca*—breaking the bones of Judas. With a sudden sinking of heart, Esperanza recalled that Pepe had been wont to take this part.

Old Alvaro, maker of holy images, perspiring copiously, his black beard quivering, peered over steel-rimmed specs at a text from which he chanted lugubriously. He stumbled over a dog and kicked at him angrily.

People laughed. Esperanza laughed. Everything became more real for being in natural terms of daily life.

Behind, on a second platform, rode a piously sorrowing image of Mary—pale skin, eyes downcast, clasped hands—dressed in a celestial, star-sprinkled robe. She was held aloft by four silk-clad Indian girls (one was Guadalupe) their glistening black hair loose down their back, their eyes streaming tears. It was odd to see Guadalupe, ever so gay, weeping thus as though her heart would break. The girls staggered under their heavy burden, and few of the eyes of the beholders were dry.

An outsider might smile at the material crudeness of the pageant, but to dwellers of Milpa Verde it was all real, more real than the routine of their own toil worn lives. It was real to Esperanza, too, but now and then reality snapped, and at moments it all seemed pitiable rather than tragic.

She had been to Mexico City, had seen grander things. Her old naïvete was gone. With a frightened start, she realized that no longer was she entirely one with all the village folk, at least

not in the old guileless way, which took everything on faith. She had been granted the blessing—or the curse—of perspective.

As the days sped by, Esperanza did fall into the old simple routine. Having no intention of being a burden on Pablo she worked at her loom and wove and embroidered fajas and other things, more profitable she soon found than weaving petates. Wool was cheap.

From time to time she went to Amecameca to sell—there before the triple arch as of old. Once more at the close of day, she enjoyed the dancing monfires, all the good camaraderie.

But she was different. Her fellows knew it. Now they came to her, a bit awed, to have her read their letters or make calculations.

One day in the plaza, opposite the market, Esperanza saw a young but fat woman hauling a child along harshly by the hand. Something about her seemed familiar.

"Who is that?" she asked a man near her, who was selling shoes.

He grinned, and a quick look passed between him and another vender. "Oh, she's the wife of the new storekeeper—Señor Alfarez."

Esperanza puzzled but could not place her.

Not till that evening did she hit on it—Pepita, Caldwell's former mistress! . . . So, her husband was now a storekeeper. She had a child. Evidently she had lost most of her old attractiveness.

Occasionally foreigners, scarcely able to speak Spanish, came along. They had not seemed queer in Mexico City, but here they popped around so disjointedly—just like marionettes. They had no real relation to anything; they seemed brittle. Like struck metal, they made odd sounds, sounds promptly gone in the thin upland air. Nothing was left.

They were stupid, too. Esperanza soon discovered she could charge them four or five times the real worth of a faja.

She thought back on "Meester" Caldwell. Now, she realized, he, too, like the other foreigners, had had an odd, brittle quality. He had been kind to her; but he had been brittle. She groped for the meaning of this. She felt herself so fluid; life had a corresponding rhythm to her own being. But Caldwell and his kind were made of straight lines. All these foreign folk were hard straight lines. They could not really feel beauty; they hacked at the world ambitiously; the Indian flowed with it.

To card the wool, to weave the fajas, to embroider them, to sell them—this was a cycle that had its proper rhythm. Mats, she thought, were the pattern of life smoothed out with patience. Fajas were the circle of life's fecundity; they went about the loins. One was for rest and peace; the other was for action.

Gradually, sitting at the back door, weaving or sewing, and watching the fields and the two great volcanoes, Esperanza's sickness of soul was again cured; her spirits became healthy and strong again, rooted like a tree.

Peace, likewise, was apparently returning to the land. The days of Rufo's abuses were gone. A few peons worked on the hacienda, but though of the village, their employment was now voluntary; they were now paid like any other day laborers. Though legally the village still belonged to the hacienda, the new administrator—a perfunctory person merely carrying out essential duties pending an inheritance settlement—made no attempt to press claims or oust the villagers.

Most were now merely cultivating their own little plots and surviving as best they could. If they no longer received the former pittance for toil on the estate, they were happier. If there was less food, there were no more lashings.

And so the strife of civil war now seemed far off. The holy stones of the village, said to be fragments of a stone god thrown from Heaven, which would some day stir—as Luis had told her—lay all peaceful in the sunlight of a perfect spring day.

Weeks, months sped by. There were many fiestas. There was the dance of the Christians and Moors. The crosses were repainted. In one fiesta, Pablo, ordinarily so mild and quiet a man, became a ferocious dragon in a gold-looking helmet, with a big purple plume and a mask of ferocious moustaches, and a pike on to which was tacked, of all things, a tiny French flag. The days of Maximilian had left some impress on the country.

All Soul's day came and went. Esperanza joined in the procession, with food and drink and lighted candles in bottles, to the cemetery. Across the marigold fields they went. The heaps of orange zemapuchitl flowers, the bread on the table, the special choal tamales made from *aguatli* and *alegría* seeds, the jiggling homemade skeletons of the dead, all this was a shining glory of beauty and reverence. Outside each door was a path of petals to guide the wandering souls of children.

One night the whole village crept out clandestinely—Father Mateo disapproved—to the springs which provided water for the village, and ceremonies were conducted to the ancient pagan god of irrigation, for Milpa Verde just then was suffering from drought. The villagers planted little green twigs and put crosses and other symbols of fertility, such as the placenta of child-bearing mothers, about on the trees. The blood of a live sheep was sprinkled on the waters.

Soon after, sluices of water were descending on the village, and even the nights remained dripping and chill. But fresh was the earth, washed clean as every leaf, and the bodies and souls of men were quickened. At night from the huts shone the flickering dance points of pale gold light; and under the fruit trees and around in the cornfields shone other lights, and the whisper of prayer in mellow voices ran through the corn.

And thus Esperanza took up her life again as part of the community. It was a life without love of man, but otherwise was tranquil and rich.

How long it would be thus she did not know. For the hope of peace in the country had been very brief. Bandits were now about. Federal troops passed near the village, or through it. Many were going south to fight the Zapatistas. War in the north, led by Carranza, was growing more menacing.

"Chickens will be scarce this year," said Pablo, with a quizical and prophetic shake of his head.

XXIX

Esperanza was sewing at the front door. A familiar figure trudged up the lane.

Life suddenly expanded in her like a bright tree. It was José.

With a cry of delight, she ran toward him.

They killed the fatted calf for him—in reality a plump chicken. They spent hours grinding up the spices for the sauces.

He had the air of a traveled, self-reliant person. No longer did he wear peasant clothes, but good foreign attire, a pink silk shirt, felt hat, store shoes. He was no longer a villager.

Everyone remembered how he had been whipped and shipped off. And here he was with good clothes, and money jingling in his pockets.

José felt his importance. He took a small chile, the hottest

kind, and bit it in two, chewing the seeds carefully to get the fiery sting, and told of his experiences.

Carried off to Mexico City, he had been dressed up in a uniform and tight shoes. Gun in hand, he had been drilled and drilled, then sent north in a box car to put down the revolution. North and north and more north, the conscripts rattled, camp women perched about, the car full of animals, bird-cages, dogs, parrots, cooking braziers.

Unloaded in the Durango sage-brush, the recruits treked wearily across the low desert hills—dust, sun, heat, feet up and down, up and down, mouths cracking for water.

"We were so tired," said José, "that I began seeing red, dancing specks in the brush. I saw Rufo with the lash in his hands. I saw that damn' stone idol chasing María Teresa through the sage-brush."

Esperanza told him how Rufo had joined the revolution and how he had helped Luis.

José scowled skeptically and went on with his story—how in Tempisque, toward dawn, a cloud of rebels swept out of the cactus hills and circled the town—flying dervishes.

In the confusion of the firing, José slipped off into the brush.

The rebels, victorious, occupied the place.

José went boldly down and surrendered.

A grim, bony rebel officer questioned him severely, and a day later José was riding across the desert on a wall-eyed pinto with the revolutionary forces; he was part of Pancho Villa's rebel army.

Later, he saw, even talked to the great rebel—a heavy set, jovial dare-devil, half Robin Hood, half savage. That was shortly before the famous attack on Ciudad Juárez, which gave the final blow to the Díaz régime. José told of his part in it vividly.

Suddenly they were all demobilized, told to go back home and be good.

José, like so many others, was cut adrift.

He slipped across the border into the United States.

He worked at many odd jobs, cotton picking in the South, fruit-picking in California. He went on strike in a big apricot and peach cannery, to raise wages from seventeen to twenty-five cents an hour. The strike was broken up by a buzzing, angry committee of righteous Christian night rider citizens, believing in that Holy American Trinity—money, 100 per cent American—

ism, and starvation for others. The strike leaders were tarred and feathered, several were beaten to pulp. One died.

José drifted from pillar to post. Having learned some English, he got a job in a Los Angeles biscuit factory. He saved enough money to go back to Mexico City, where for a while he drove a taxicab. But now the country was bubbling with revolution again, and he was eager to join Zapata, especially since Huerta had murdered the beloved Madero.

José had heard of Luis' death and had traced Esperanza back to Milpa Verde. He threw up his job and set out to see her, for Milpa Verde was also on the road to Morelos, where Zapata was operating. Battles with federals had occurred not far from the village.

About this time Gerónimo slapped his mules through town on his way to Amecameca. Like most of his kind, he was now a trusted messenger for Zapata. Gerónimo winked an eye and told José he would soon be in the thick of the fray. News of Zapata successes came in. Every day he was reported nearer to Milpa Verde.

One bright morning a large band of big-hatted Zapatista swept down from the lower hills of the Smoke Mountain upon the town.

The newcomers were big men from the south in typical white cotton costume or else in tight black silver-striped trousers—"the silver-plated ones" they were called. All wore enormous felt hats with wide, deep brims and weighted with gold and silver braid.

The people of Milpa Verde rang the bells of San Benito for them, and though the crop had been scant, they turned every home into a kitchen.

On the whole the newcomers were well-behaved—though now and then there was a drunken fight or a girl raped. Younger girls fell in love with the soldiers. Guadalupe was all aflutter.

One night, coming home after dark by the back lane, Petra saw a familiar girlish figure in the embrace of a big Zapatista, under an enormous hat.

For all her stolidity, Petra had her moments of aggressive righteousness.

"Guadalupe!" she screamed.

Hardly had the pair disengaged than Petra was upon them. Grasping Guadalupe by the arm, she berated the Zapatista furiously.

He took one look at her and scuttled.

Guadalupe, in tears, choking with rage, said she would elope.

After that Petra kept an eagle eye on her, though probably Esperanza's restraining influence had more effect.

When the Zapatistas left ten days later, a good portion of the young female population went with them to become camp followers. Many a local swain mourned a lost sweetheart. But Guadalupe was not among the missing, though for many a moon she was discontented.

Quite a few younger villagers joined. Bobo ran along with them. He always got along well with soldiers, who looked upon him as a mascot.

José secured a good horse and because of his experience with Villa was made a captain.

From the porch Esperanza sadly watched the force winding up into higher country. She waved several times.

When, she wondered, would she and José be together again? She prayed daily for his safety.

The federals stalked into town on the heels of the Zapatistas. Five suspected villagers were dragged out and shot.

In revenge two peasants, believed to have been informers, were secretly knifed into sieves and their bodies wedged in the rocks of Tetatzco ravine.

Then, for a while, passions subsided.

But presently armed incursions into the village became more frequent. All over the country things were stirring. Drunken President Huerta had fled abroad. Carranza came in and Villa split away from him, and they were now hammering each other and the whole land on the anvil of their rivalry. Men, families, towns, whole armies were tossed around like a swirl of dead leaves.

As violence in and about Milpa Verde increased, scarcely a chicken, pig, cow, burro, mule or horse was left, though a few villagers had secret hiding places for their belongings. Pablo had a little cache of gold and silver buried in the garden, and thus far he had managed to hide his little gray burro.

Esperanza also had her little reserve, so they could purchase things in Amecameca. But there was now no market for her fajas.

Most of the villagers were soon half starving. Living on roots

and berries and strange plants, they shrank to skin and bones. Old Alvaro, the saint-carver, looked like an animated beard, so weazened was he, his cheek bones sticking out from his hirsute adornment like yellow knives.

Many villagers went off with the rebels, since that at least offered a chance to live.

Several times, Esperanza fled to Amecameca. Several times, along with other women, she hid out in the hill caves. Once they had had to huddle there for four days. Apprehensively the women would watch the circling buzzards, as with powerful, controlled movement, accurately they would spiral down; and the heart of each watcher was wondering whether the lugubrious bird was making a feast of some loved one.

Once, coming back from the caves, one of the women gave a scream. Her man was moaning in the bushes, his shirt blood-soaked. Shot, he had fallen nearly dead off his burro, now peacefully munching the grass.

Zapata himself at last entered the capital, like a primeval king of liberty. In Milpa Verde, the arrival of this news was shortly followed by the appearance of a strong Zapatista detachment from the south.

Everyone ran out excitedly to welcome them gaily.

Esperanza caught up her rebozo and hurried down the lane, hoping against hope that José might be with them.

Her hopes dashed, she went back home slowly and sadly.

But just as she neared the gate, up rode José, his face filled with dust and lined with fatigue, his unshaven beard sprouting single wiry Indian whiskers.

"We have won!" he cried to Esperanza. "From now on Mexico will belong to the peasants. The old days are gone."

She asked about Bobo.

"He left us about a month ago. He was all right then."

José had little time to rest or talk. He bolted a meal and that same afternoon went on with the rest of the force.

With all this factional feud in the country, villagers took sides, and more than ever Milpa Verde itself was plunged into strife, brother against brother. There were any number of fights.

Esperanza, unable to make head or tail of the right or wrong of all the various groups, grew sadder at the thought of all the bloodshed and waste and people starving on every hand.

XXX

Why could not the heart be still? Why was not the beauty of each day sufficient? Why did not the past die gracefully?

Times there were when Esperanza awoke in the dead of night and felt Luis' arms about her. The disillusionment was almost too great. She could only fold little Rosa to her bosom and in the concealing shroud of the dark, tears would flow down her face.

One warm night, restless, Esperanza got up from her straw mat and went out on the back porch. The chickens roosting in the castor-bean tree clucked at being disturbed. She heard the burro munching on brittle corn stalks. But the air was still. The moon was on the volcanoes, then a shadow blotted it out; blackness erased the silver. It seemed that at that moment Luis came up behind her and put his arms about her. His warm breath was on her neck.

But he was gone. The clouds still darkened the moon.

Empty, heavy-hearted, but conscious of her bated breath, her warm young body, the passion she could give to no loving lips, Esperanza returned and lay down on her mat.

Her occupations did not fill the void. A woman, incomplete, however much she loved the dead Luis, she needed a living love.

One hearty young peasant, Ignacio Fuentes, had paid court to her before Luis. Now he had his eye on her again, still thought her beautiful and desirable. He was tall, all Indian, black thatched hair, big black eyes, full cheek bones, round hairless chin, and square-cut lips—they projected in a slight muzzle. He was a hard-working chap, and except for an occasional drinking bout or knife fight at fiestas, was quite above the average villager in intelligence and initiative.

But Esperanza gave him no encouragement.

She was next laid siege to by Eduardo De Negri, another young peasant—physically handsome, great ox-like shoulders coming down triangularly through a massive chest to panther-like hips, and long, deer legs—a swift passionate man of twenty-eight.

Esperanza felt the terrific physical pull of him, but again she saw all his limitations. She found it too easy, and several times did not refrain from making a bit of sport of him in homely village idiom. "You will always smell of the straw mat, my dear boy," she would drawl. In the end he resented her banter deeply.

Much as Esperanza loved Milpa Verde, the most promising

village male seemed sadly inferior to Luis, insignificant and unstimulating. Though happy in the village, her mind was rich and leapt beyond it. It was one thing to be wedded to the growing corn, to feel the cycle of days and seasons, to glory in the landscape and live in harmony with the two volcanoes, but quite something else to be married to a villager.

More and more the good folk of Milpa Verde seemed somewhat dull and plodding. Strangely, the city from which she had fled so bitterly, now called her constantly, its traffic, its lights, its non-rooted way of living, its bustle, its independence, its multiple impression, its more sophisticated folk.

Unsatisfied sexually, more and more Esperanza turned to pious devotion. She cushioned herself on the pagan-Catholic ritual she found at hand, and turned incessantly from the world of uncertainty, with its violence everywhere about, to the apparent certainty of the little saint in the hacienda chapel, who for centuries had saved crops, halted epidemics, brought children to sterile women and had forgiven sins.

It took the mind off her emptiness, her lack of sexual fulfillment and the meaningless danger of life, to revel in the beauty of altars and saints. She wore out her knees before the crucifix.

Gradually she forged about herself an iron ring of beatitude. Within it was the core of herself. Now she shut out even the village and lived alone, mostly in moods, a vague delicious communion. And so she drugged her inner restlessness without at all solving it.

She worked, she greeted her neighbors patiently, chatted with them, but all the time she was cuddling up to the warm core of herself, content with that inner glow which made all outer things vague.

Fortunately she did not remain in this selfish and evasive state of religious experience, or her life might have been permanently maimed.

Gradually the warm core of her demanded more nourishment. Again she began to inquire about life, its meaning, the meaning for Mexico's disorder, a thousand and one things. How, how did one get power over life?

Throughout the countryside circulated news of a great healer and prophet who had taken up residence on Peñascal Mountain, northwest of Amecameca. His name was Lorenzo de Fé. A new

laying on of hands, and the maimed, the halt and the blind, went their way cured.

His fame grew by leaps and bounds. Tens of thousands visited him with their ailments or out of holy curiosity.

It was even reported that he was really the ancient white god, Quetzalcoatl, returned to his people. The tidings ran like wind over the corn from village to village—"Quetzalcoatl has returned . . . The great white God has come back from over the sea in his white-winged boat . . ."

The uncertainty of the times, the revolts, the breaking up of old molds of life, the beliefs in saviors, the faith that a new era of Utopia, of fat corn and golden prosperity, was at hand, helped propagate these wild rumors. Men, torn from routine life, turned their eyes toward salvation, toward new gods, new leaders, new hopes—and above all, something secure to cling to in the midst of chaos. And now the whole world was in chaos. War was raging in Europe. All men felt the abyss beneath their feet. All were frightened, seeking something.

Sick of soul, Esperanza, too, was seeking greater assurance in life, something to complete herself. Would the new healer and teacher give her the golden word, unroll the dark scroll? She caught the general contagion.

Though the distance was thirty miles, one sunny morning, Esperanza left Rosa with Petra and set out on foot.

Over her shoulder, she carried a fiber bag of tortillas, ground corn and chile sauce, and a change of clothing, including the dress and shoes she had worn in the city.

As her sandaled feet hit the earth, damp from morning mist, she felt as though she had broken bounds, that once more the world lay before her.

She passed peasants with tasseled burros, loaded with small dark-stained kegs of pulque, men and women with heavy loads on their backs—charcoal, pottery, crates of vegetables, chickens, turkeys, all on their way to market. She fell in with a man and wife and three children, like herself, pilgrims on their way to the holy Lorenzo. One child was blind. Now it would be cured—the sadness of years had been lifted from the hearts of these simple folk; holy joy transfused their faces.

That night Esperanza stayed over in Amecameca to get an early start the next day. She borrowed a straw mat from a market friend and lay curled up all night before the bonfires.

Long before dawn she was on the road again, out past the Sacro Monte, the outline scarcely distinguishable. The maguey plants and stones along the way were like strange monsters, every shape uncanny. But Esperanza padded along the spongy earth, unfrightened, cheerful, soul uplifted. She breathed the cold morning air into her strong lungs. Her body felt fresh and free with the quickened joy of healthy, early rising.

Slowly the day brightened. Now she could see dimly stones, trees, plants, till abruptly a dense mist closed in about her. She trotted through milky obscurity which concealed everything more than a few yards away. Bushes, trees, huts, loomed suddenly, disappeared—a phantom world. Voices, calls, tinkle of bells, the moo of a cow, a burro's bray, came muffled from nowhere. She was alone in a white coffin, but alive. The cold air felt fuzzy as it went down into her lungs.

The mist thinned to an opalescent glimmer, then to a golden glow. It lifted, settled thick again, then lifted swiftly.

The corn in the sear fields had been harvested; only brown stubble remained. Here and there grazed tawny cows.

At last the sun came out clear and strong. She joyed in its warmth. Behind her rose the volcanoes—white, unaltered. This all seemed to her symbolic of her pilgrimage—an emerging from the coffin of herself into a new sunlight.

The road grew crowded—pilgrims of every sort—peons, workers, city folk, even well-dressed people, afoot and on horseback. One elegantly dressed woman rode past, features covered with a black veil—her face was eaten half away.

Just as horse riders passed by Esperanza, so she passed folks less fortunate than herself: paralyzed people dragging themselves along by their hands; folks on crutches; a blind man tapped his way cautiously, guiding himself by the voices and footsteps of others; people with terrible ulcers; deformed folk with great swollen heads or distorted limbs; club-feet. A man with one leg shorter than the other walked painfully in wide, swaying arcs—but hope shone in his face. A big tongue lolled out of a swollen mouth of one young fellow with bulging eyes, deaf, dumb, all but blind. Fat women, great mountains of greasy flesh, hoped to get thin—the trip was agony for them. The dark cellars of despair from all over the land had vomited forth their misery upon this rocky road to Peñascal. The poor, the tatterdemalion, the lepers,

the have-nots struggled up the ascending trail; those better off rode on horseback.

Esperanza climbed through the foothills, mounted a ridge of tilted crosses over heaps of stones, and trotted rapidly down a valley—the shaded air at the bottom was coolish. But as she climbed the opposite side, the day grew rapidly warmer.

By noon, Esperanza was perspiring up the steep slope. The sun was blazing hot now; the air, filled with acrid dust, carried the rotten stench of hundreds of dreadful diseases, of flesh rotting, people slowly dying, but dragging on with a last hope.

She fell in with a tall Indian girl with wild black hair, gleaming pop eyes and a large hatchet nose. Sterile, she wanted a child. Surely it would be easy for the great Lorenzo to make her fertile. The corn gave forth fruit; the trees blossomed and produced; the animals mated—why had she been shut out from this? She was just a mule, could not conceive.

They talked and traveled on for many a mile till the sun was low, a weak globe over the far purple ridges that swept skyward in steep hard ribs, like some starving dinosaur. Peñescal was only an hour away.

The road had become a river of folk. On the craggy hillside among the magueyes, the cactus and false-pepper trees, hundreds of impromptu huts had been thrown up. Water had to be brought more than a mile. There was no sanitation. The stench struck to high heaven for miles around.

Finally Esperanza, nearly exhausted, could get no nearer, and let her companion struggle on ahead, while she herself sat down on a stone.

She had not expected so many people. Many of these folk would have to wait months before seeing the healer. For that reason they had built huts. Esperanza could not hope to see him that day, perhaps not for a long time.

This did not matter much. She had the patience of all her people: time means little, purpose everything. Thus they had survived four centuries of abuse, by lying with their bellies against the earth—like stones—they were a new biological-botanical-geologic expression on the face of nature—but the undying purpose was always there, and limitless patience to achieve it.

And so now Esperanza waited, like the earth, like a stone, like a tree.

As twilight settled, fires were lit. Smoke curled up. Torches weaved in and out of the huts. The air buzzed with voices. The smell of cooking drowned out the stench of excrement and disease.

That night Esperanza wandered about as over a battlefield. Folk slept on mother earth. They slept in compact rows, body warming body, disease touching disease. Most should have been in bed with medical assistance.

Esperanza found a fairly secluded place to rest. She slept only fitfully. At that high altitude the night was frightfully cold.

Up about three, she put on her city clothes to stand in line to get a ticket of admission to the healer. The line moved forward at a snail's pace. Now and then a match, lighting a cigarette, would flare in the dark.

Gradually the stars grew dim. The sun crept palely over the mountains, grew hotter and hotter. By eleven the cicadas were shrilling. People grew faint. Some, not wishing to lose their places, sat right down in the dust. Several keeled over entirely. Everyone was so intent on his own salvation that these were merely laid beside the road to recover as best they might, the sun still beating down on them, the ants and flies crawling over them—millions of flies.

People died. These lay dead a long time, but some community instinct led to shallow graves being dug. The bodies were thrown in and covered over and the spot marked with a cross of sticks tied together.

Not until two that afternoon did Esperanza, half sick, dizzy with weariness and hunger, reach the spot to apply to see the healer.

The well-dressed little Indian to whom she spoke looked her over keenly. "You're not sick," he said, sharply.

"Only in the heart," she replied. "I want to talk to him. He can help me."

More neatly dressed than the others, she had assurance because of her experiences in Mexico City.

He sized her up with shrewd eyes, nodded and gave her a ticket for three days hence—the eyes of those behind her bulged with envy. Many would have to wait ten times that long. She went back to wait.

A small trading center had sprung up in the encampment. Indians had brought corn which lay in golden heaps on either side

of a little lane. One hut had been converted into a store. Venders of all sorts circulated. Even ice-cream freezers went about balanced on black Indian heads. Water was sold from *ollas* in leather racks on burros. A man with an ulcered nose had been cunning enough to drive a cow ahead of him. He had slaughtered it and had converted a pepper-tree into a butcher shop—the bloody meat, now turned purple and black with flies, hung from every twig. Intestines, cleaned for sale, were looped over the branches Christmas-tree fashion.

Esperanza wandered ghost-like about the stinking encampment and did what she could for those needing help, bought water for poverty-stricken ones dying of thirst, found safe places for the blind, and for a day and a half took charge of a four-year-old girl.

Three days later, even with the card, Esperanza again found herself in a mob. She edged nearer. After several sweltering hours, she finally was admitted to a trail that after about a quarter of a mile led to the mountain top.

There, though she could not catch a glimpse of him, was the healer. One could easily imagine that he was a huge stone, thrown into a pool save that all the ripples of agitated humanity converged toward instead of away from him.

Esperanza moved to one side and standing on tiptoe, finally caught sight of him.

There was something familiar about him. She moved closer.

Lorenzo de la Fé was none other than Lorenzo Romero, the companion of María Teresa!

His hair, formerly plastered down, now fell over his shoulders in long locks, like that of a Messiah. His eyes blazed with fanatic cunning fire.

She was dazed.

How had *he* come here? How had *he* become a famed healer?

Certainly—she smiled—*he* was not Quetzalcoatl. Was he even a great healer?

She felt disillusioned, let down. This was succeeded by exaltation. She already knew him. She remembered his strange effect upon her; she remembered the dream and his caresses. Was this unexpected meeting here, after all, ordained by some higher power?

Patiently working her way closer, she saw him put a dumb man into a swing. When he had the patient swinging high, Lo-

renzo hit him a terrific blow in the kidneys, almost dislodging him from his seat. The man let out a surprised, animal-like, "Ugh! Ugh!"

The mob at once screeched to high heaven. "He speaks! He speaks!"

News of another cure whirled through the impromptu camp, shaking the miserable hopefuls like tasseled corn. Those far beyond the favored enclosure soon swayed and ebbed.

"A dumb man hath spoken!"

"Another cure!"

"When will my turn come?"

"Glory be to God! Soon I shall walk again!"

A female mountain of flesh pulled out her chancered breast before all beholders and threw back her head to heaven in a wail of grieving happiness.

The frantic press of people became almost too great to be controlled.

Suddenly there was a jangle and clatter of horsemen. Lorenzo straightened up and looked surprised, almost alarmed, down the hill.

The State had sent its soldiers, hundreds of them. Long lines of khaki-clad men, rifles in hand, were moving up the cactus slope.

The officer came up to Lorenzo, saluted him respectfully. The two talked.

Everyone was restless, whispering, excited, hostile toward the soldiers. What did this mean? What would happen?

The officer saluted Lorenzo, retired and deployed his men.

He tried to get the immediate crowd around Lorenzo into some sort of order. Not easy, for everyone feared to lose his proper turn.

Lorenzo's eyes ran over those waiting. Shrewdly he picked out a man with crutches.

Beaming with happiness and hope, the cripple scrambled forward.

Lorenzo made mystic signs over him, then carefully felt his body. He shook his head and put the man over under the shade of a roof extending out from an improvised cabin.

Again his eye wandered over the crowd. Once more he called up a man with crutches, a thin, agile fellow, who swung over

the ground at a great rate. After making signs and feeling his body and talking to him, Lorenzo made him face the crowd.

The healer stood over him with fists upraised. Then, lifting the heavy, golden cross he was wearing about his neck, Lorenzo held it before the cripple, bade him kiss it. He made magic passes, several low obeisances, walked muttering three times around the man. With a fluid gesture, he ran his hand half a dozen times down the man's useless limb, then straightened up, raising his hands to Heaven, fists again clenched, a white, staring fury in his eyes.

Suddenly he stuck his face, fearfully distorted, into that of the patient. "Walk!" he screamed.

The cripple stood there blinking, trembling, ash-colored.

"Walk! Throw away your crutches! Walk!" screamed Lorenzo.

But the man only trembled and blinked. His fingers merely clutched more tightly in his fearful effort to release the crutches.

Unexpectedly Lorenzo kicked one of the crutches out from under the man, screaming again, "Walk!"

The man took a few steps, swayed, fell in a heap, writhing and frothing.

Those few steps had been enough. The crowd screamed, "He walks! He walks!"

Lorenzo picked the man up, set him on his feet, and walked him toward the cabin porch.

The cripple's steps were faltering, the bad leg dragged, but sustained by Lorenzo's wiry but strong arm, he managed to sink panting and pale upon the porch.

"He walks! He walks!" screamed the throng.

So great was the frenzy, the soldiers lost control of the crowd. They gripped their guns, stocks ready to club those who pushed too close. But how could they club maimed and crippled folk?

They hesitated, confused, and the mob swept them aside. Consumptives, the paralyzed, lame and blind, the lepers, syphilitics, the ulcered, the itchy, the club-footed and hunchbacked swirled in a mad struggle to get closer to Lorenzo.

Esperanza was flung forward like a straw on a boiling current. The soldiers were also just so many helpless straws in that human whirlpool.

Lorenzo straightened up, turned about, faced the mob. He came forward silently, hands upraised.

Miraculously the frenzy died away. The mob stopped, grew still. Only a continuous shudder ran through its ranks.

"Lorenzo comes. Be quiet."

A hush fell over the hill. No one moved. Even the shudder died away.

He continued to advance, with firm tread and fierce glance. The festering mob fell back, crowding those behind.

Esperanza was spell-bound, breathless. To her amazement, now she saw at his heels, of all persons, Bobo, twisting his hands, contorting his face. The healer and Bobo—what a weird combination!

Everyone now watched the healer—whose strained air seemed to portend something unusual—in breathless silence. Hope filled a hundred breasts. Each was praying he might be the next one chosen.

Lorenzo went up to the captain of the guard, who had been unable to extricate his soldiers or restore discipline.

In a loud voice, Lorenzo shouted, "Tell your men to put up their guns and fall back."

As if entranced, the captain meekly gave the order. The crowd loosened up to let the soldiers withdraw.

Uncoiling a thread, Lorenzo laid it along the ground some fifty yards down the hillside. Then he unrolled another thread paralleling it, making a wide lane between.

"Let no man step over the threads into this lane," he cried out. "The man, woman or child who does so will not be cured."

The crowd at once stood back from the thread as though facing a dangerous serpent. No man shoved.

And so a tiny thread proved more potent than the guns of the state.

Lorenzo walked along the lane. His burning eyes fell on Esperanza. His glance bored right through her.

She felt weak in the knees, in her very bowels. She trembled violently. At that moment he could have done anything with her.

A warm smile illuminated his face. "Esperanza!"

Taking her two hands, he pulled her out from the throng.

Everyone watched her enviously.

Bobo threw his arms about her waist.

She leaned over and kissed him on the forehead. "So you are here, too, Bobo?"

He nodded. He seemed calmer, almost normal except for his odd shape.

But suddenly he cried happily, writhing his hands. "The flame is on the mountain now! The flame! The flame!"

"Come!" said Lorenzo. He led Esperanza up the lane.

Those in the crowd gaped at the three of them, Lorenzo, the woman who knew Lorenzo, and the dwarf who knew them both.

"Where have you come from? . . . Have you seen María Teresa? . . . We are separated, you know . . ." And so, oblivious to the waiting throng, he chatted with her.

"Of course, you will wait for lunch," he told her. "I never eat until about five. Then we will talk some more."

So she sat on the porch with the man with crutches and the man now without crutches, and with Bobo, while Lorenzo continued his healing.

XXXI

The healing was accompanied by the steady noise of saws and hammers. A little settlement was springing up on the flat crown of Peñascal—a long series of rough, wooden huts for those needing longer treatment.

Promptly at five, a man blew a trumpet blast. The pandemonium ceased. The master would eat—no more healing that day.

Those already admitted to the sacred enclosure prepared to spend the night there, so as not to lose their chance on the morrow. It was a cold spot. Though the large cabin of the master was snug, sheltered by an outcropping of rock, the wind swept over the flat crown, bare save for half a dozen scrubby pines, the lower branches of which had been ripped off.

Lorenzo led Esperanza into the cabin. An Indian woman was setting out plates of soup on a long, wooden table. Esperanza took her place on one of two benches, with him, Bobo, and four assistants.

Lorenzo had washed himself carefully and had put on a purple jacket, which with his long hair, gave him a regal aspect.

Esperanza thought of the Lord's Last Supper. The hard-faced youth with spiky hair might be Paul. The softer, dreaming man with humble voice might be Peter. The tricky-eyed Indian with his blunt nose and nervous pursing mouth was perhaps Judas. But the man in the ill-shaped check suit and green tie, who talked loudly out of the side of a shovel mouth, seemed a sort of promoter and did not carry out her fleeting parallel.

Lorenzo grandiloquently introduced her to his companions:

"The beautiful Esperanza Huitrón, widow of Cardona. She is hereby voted a comrade of the clan."

Esperanza really was beautiful, just over twenty. No longer merely an Indian peasant girl, her silk city dress, her hair carefully done, made her another person. Attired thus, she actually thought differently. One could see that she was not entirely a city person, but her fine features, her high intelligent forehead, her alert black eyes, combined sweet innocent seductiveness with intelligence and maturity. She had been broadened by experience, quickened by Luis' fine mind; and given a taste of civilized life, she now reflected a soul of some conscious complexity.

She watched Lorenzo closely, attracted and repelled by his mannerisms, his handsome face, his flashing dark gaze. His gestures were authoritative and arrogant; he was a consummate actor.

Tricky little lines crinkled about his eyes; his mouth wore a cunning, disdainful smile; his eyes drooped in cynicism.

They had wine with their meal. It went to Esperanza's head.

They were all gay, in part a reaction to the nerve-racking strain of handling such a mob and seeing such gruesome sights, an unhealthy macabre gaiety. "Death" came into the jokes frequently. Despite Lorenzo's prophetic airs, there was an easy camaraderie in the group.

"You must stay for our evening show," Lorenzo told her.

"I must get back to Milpa Verde," she protested.

"Nonsense," said Lorenzo, arbitrarily. "We should all feel offended. Tonight you can occupy one of the new cabins."

He raised his glass to hers.

The others shouted gaily that she had to stay.

Soon after dark, the stage—the porch of the cabin—was fitted up with bright carbide lights and drapes and palm branches. Though the wind howled across the top of the mountain beastly cold, the mob of sick and hopeful stood expectantly in the biting chill.

Lorenzo, moved by a real acting instinct, had devised entertainment for his crowd of pitiable charges. First came a rough, comedy skit—Lorenzo dressed in a Romeo costume of black velvet breeches; the check-suit man with the green tie wore a long scarlet cape and sword. And Peter (rightly Enrique) was decked out as a plumpish woman. There was a slap-stick repartee, a duel between Lorenzo and Check-Suit, which of course Lorenzo won,

brandishing his sword, one foot on his adversary's chest. Despite the dueling over a make-believe woman, it all had a homosexual flavor.

The piece produced loud cheers. Most of the audience, poor hill-billy peasants from remote villages, had their own religious and pagan dances, their festivals. Their imaginations, never dulled by the elaborateness of modern diversions, could make up for any material deficiencies.

Lorenzo, borrowing the scarlet cloak to add to his velvet trousers, played a guitar and sang—he had a beautiful tenor voice—a romantic, tearful song to the lady-love Enrique coyly looking up at him.

Volunteers were called from the audience. Two men carried up an armless, legless boy. He did remarkable stunts with mouth, lips and teeth. He balanced a glass of water while going through all sorts of disagreeable, convulsive movements; he threaded a needle and sewed two pieces of cloth, and shot beans through a tin tube at a target which he bowled over each time.

A girl gave a veil dance—with all her clothes on.

Then Lorenzo and his assistants put on a court drama. Lorenzo, of course, was king, with a golden paper crown and the scarlet cape inside out to show its purple lining.

Bobo was court jester, and did handsprings all over the place between intervals of making faces and showing his claws and shrieking "Whoeee."

The crowd laughed uproarously.

What had seemed supernatural and terrifying in him was now farce.

Esperanza marvelled at Lorenzo's energy. He had been up before dawn wrestling with this mob. He took only a cup of coffee for nourishment until he finished at five. Then he arranged for the show and staged it.

About ten the show was finished with a strange discourse by Lorenzo. He praised the audience, the actors, and himself most of all, mixing this up with queer theosophic jargon.

They went inside to eat again—more wine and even more joviality.

Lorenzo simply could not keep from acting. Once he jumped up from the table and mimicked an effeminate male.

Every one doubled into convulsions, even Esperanza. After the play and the hours of relaxation, things did not seem so macabre.

It was nearly midnight when Lorenzo lit Esperanza's way over to a newly constructed cabin, smelling of fresh pine and turpentine. He apologized that there was no bed.

She smiled at this.

Before leaving her, he held her hand, looking down at her.

She trembled. She caught the glint of the whites of his eyes and his white, smiling teeth.

"We are glad you came," he said simply. "You are lovely. You are like a stream that flows surely and safely to the sea. There is something impressive and sure about you. I hope you will stay a long time."

Abruptly he leaned over, kissed her hand, then left.

She went into the little cabin, trembling violently, cheeks aflame.

After a bit, more calmly, she looked around at the bare board walls. All was so strange. A few days ago she had been peacefully weaving, Rosa by her side; now she was in this strange walled room on a mountain top.

The wind whined through the decrepit stunted pine trees and along the boards of the cabin. She was filled with fear, exaltation, vague desires.

Long before she got up, slightly before dawn, she heard wails and imprecations, all the strange animal sounds of the crowd outside. She was arranging her hair with numb fingers when Enrique, the shy, soft Peter, knocked at the door with steaming coffee and toasted tortillas. Admiration for her shone in his eyes. He set the things down and went off softly.

Once the sun had come out, it was nice on the mountain crest. Esperanza sat in the lee of the big rock, half dozing. The soft light glowed on the semi-barren country about. The morning passed in a vague dream. Noon wheeled by. The afternoon hours slid along like the lone, white cloud drifting slowly toward the volcanoes. She felt such utter peace that the cries of the multitude came to her only faintly through gauze somnolence.

But towards three o'clock her normally active spirit revived. For a time, though, she merely sat watching the scene.

The mob swayed, sometimes it rocked; it was a blur of blue and white without beginning or end, without contours, without meaning, a great jelly-fish of misery flowing imperceptibly into nothing. The wind had come up again and was blowing dust unpleasantly, so that even the cabins were blurred.

Her eyes fell on a big, white stone struck by the sun. The

stone lay there, round, defined, like a symbol of eternity—the only sure, obvious thing in a blurred world of babbling sound, restless color and yellow dust.

At last she got up and walked around, soon was finding ways to help the distressed, a drink of water here, a kind word there, caring for a child while the mother saw Lorenzo.

Finally she found herself beside Lorenzo, assisting him. It did not seem a strange rôle at all.

Several times he smiled at her warmly. His acting arrogance, his dervish-like antics, never let up for an instant.

By five o'clock they were both panting from their exertions. The bugle blew. They went off to eat. The crowd sank back into lethargy.

"You must wash well," warned Lorenzo. "Here is antiseptic soap."

Again it was a gay macabre meal. Once Lorenzo leaned toward her with flushed face and a queer, lustful light in his eyes.

But all he said—in an almost accusing tone—was: "What are you going to contribute to the show tonight?"

She could do nothing except dance the jarabe—anybody could do that.

But all shouted "Fine!" Check-Suit cried, "I will be your partner. But the costume?"

Lorenzo settled that. "She'll put on Enrique's short skirts. You get one of the carpenter's white suits and a big, red sash. I'll play. We have a man with an accordion tonight. That will make a lively jarabe."

All Esperanza's protests were stifled. She became part of the cast. Once they had overcome her timidity, she felt happier to be a real part of the group.

"You can be in the king scene, too," Lorenzo suddenly suggested, rapidly fixing up a part and impromptu dialogue.

"Do you play the guitar?" He promised to teach her, lessons to begin right after lunch.

Did he never think of resting, thought Esperanza?

At the first lesson, he showed her the strings, the holds, a few simple strokes. Every time that he took hold of her hand to show her just how to place her fingers, she trembled.

If he noticed he made no remark. Several times he smiled at her, a lingering, caressing smile.

The blood mounted into her cheeks. She felt faint. For all her

secret criticisms of him, his personality wrapped her around, made her feel helpless, completely in his power.

When she went over to her cabin to get ready for the show, she found a sarape on the floor, a big olla of water with a halved gourd for scooping it out, a box to sit down on. She appreciated his thoughtfulness.

Esperanza was rather self-conscious in her short skirts which flew high as she whirled around.

The show was a big success. This evening there was a remarkable voluntary sleight-of-hand artist; also a vaquero who could make a horsehair reata revolve in amazing circles up and down and behind and along the length of his body. Gracefully he jumped in and out of the circling loop.

That night, dinner was livelier than ever. A jolly crowd. "One should never believe in sickness and sorrow," was one of Lorenzo's mottoes.

Again he escorted her over to the cabin. She trembled even before they got there.

"Sit down a moment," he commanded.

They sat together on the stoop. He talked to her, an amazing flow of language about the occult powers.

It grew colder and colder, but she listened on.

His words grew softer, seemed to embrace her more closely. His occult science flowed on easily into direct caressing praise of her.

She liked it. When he put his arm about her, she was powerless to protest, merely trembled with fear and happiness.

Before she knew it, he was kissing her; she was returning his kisses, with an ardor long suppressed.

She finally conjured up strength to push him away.

But he left her with a note of anger in his departure—this she recalled, as she sank dazed and panting upon the cold floor of the cabin.

For a long time she lay there in a huddle, the wind faintly singing in her ears. Her blood was coursing, her face flushed; she tingled all over. She had a slight nausea.

Freezing, at last she put out the light and huddled in her blankets. Chilled almost to the bone and shaken by her turbulent thoughts, it was a long time before she could sleep.

Tomorrow she would leave, must leave.

In the night, she woke and went over the problem again. What

could she, a simple girl, mean to this man astutely following his own devices—except a moment's pleasure? He wanted her because she was near at hand, healthy and good-looking, but he would never keep her. He did not love her. He did not know how to love anybody but himself.

But by now she almost worshipped him. Even his falsity, she realized, was part of the reason for his glitter and glibness, a sign of his great talent. Power exercised over others is rarely simple or honest, usually the reverse.

But a trembling terror took hold of her. The unknown frightened her. She did not want this new problem in her life.

Tomorrow she would leave.

XXXII

The following morning Enrique again knocked, brought hot coffee, looked admiringly and went away—softly, but swiftly, like a frightened rabbit.

Esperanza was out early, ministering to the folk and aiding Lorenzo.

Before she knew it, the day had slipped into noon. Hot, dusty, perspiring, disordered, she was happy. Even though Lorenzo was a charlatan, the temporary hope instilled in these people—especially those who had no right to expect any help—was to them like a few days of sunshine in long years of darkness—so she tried to argue.

But how legitimate was it to indulge humans in false hopes? Would not the resultant disillusion be all the more terrible? Was it better to have lived a few moments of exaltation than to have dragged life out uneventfully to a dark bitter end?

She was baffled. The greatest evil, as she saw it, was the giving of such false illusions to people who could be cured by proper attention. But if they would never get the chance to receive proper attention?

Almost inevitably Esperanza stayed on. Caught up in the excitement of the place, she fitted into the routine, was accepted as part of the group, had found a chance for service. She recalled the poet nun, Sor Juana Inez de la Cruz, the strange girl genius from the village above Milpa Verde, who centuries ago had given up love, studies, poetry and life itself to nurse the poor.

After lunch, during the guitar lesson, after a few strokes, Lorenzo changed to another theme. His dark eyes leaned toward

her quizzically, imperatively. He stroked her hand, talked in a low voice, swiftly, passionately.

She must stay. He needed her. She could be of great assistance in his work. They would be companions in a great service to humanity.

She struggled against his magnetism, argued. She was expected back in Milpa Verde. Her life was there. Her child was there . . . But if it were not for Rosa, with whom her life and emotions were so bound up, Esperanza would have been tempted to throw caution to the winds and accept this. Even so she was dreadfully enticed.

She was deeply flattered that a man of Lorenzo's great talent should pay attention to her, should want her, even if merely isolation and circumstance had caused this.

He offered to send for Rosa. Why should she destroy her own happiness and thwart her own desires because of Rosa? Living with him, she could do far more for the child. She was evading the issue. Rosa was no real obstacle. Rosa and life with him did not need to conflict.

She feared to bring Rosa to this disease-ridden spot. She veered to a new track. He did not, could not, care for her deeply. Like two particles in a vacuum, they had been automatically pulled toward each other. Their relation could not stand the test of time or other situations.

Grandiloquently and easily he lied. His desire for her was eternal. Wherever they wandered on the face of the globe to fulfill his preordained mission to humanity, she would be with him, would assist him, an everlasting partnership.

Soon it was necessary to prepare for the evening show. Check-Suit had worked out a new skit, in which Esperanza would figure prominently. They had to practice parts of it.

The skit proved a great success. Esperanza was thrilled by being an actress as well as a nurse. Everybody said she had great poise and talent. All, noting Lorenzo's interest in her, urged her fulsomely to stay. She was an asset to them. They needed her companionship, relieved the sordidness. They really meant this. A woman seems more able to ward off human degradation than mere man.

Again that night Lorenzo led Esperanza to her cabin. A mist was over her eyes. She was trembling more violently than ever. Tonight—would she be able to resist him?

Yet, despite his great power over her, she still hesitated. She wanted some permanent assurance in her life, not chance adventure. After Luis' death, she had faced a blank wall. She did not want to enter through a new door supposedly into a new world only to find that the path led right back to the blank wall again.

Once more Lorenzo talked, magnificent talk, or so it seemed to her. They fell into each other's arms and kissed passionately.

He begged, in the sacredness of their love, to let him come into the cabin with her.

Despite the passion his kisses aroused after such long continence, once more she managed to push him back and talk sensibly regarding their personal problem.

Magniloquently he declaimed she should not thus mutilate their love by useless fears and hesitations. Were they not ordained by God to be united? Their union, sanctified by their love and their common mission, had to be fulfilled. She should not mar it; she should be courageous enough to make this a perfect night. Life has its rhythm. Love has its rhythm. Wise humans deliver themselves to that rhythm. Once the rhythm is broken, only sadness and misunderstandings result. Instead of perfect communion, two people fall into the abyss of cross-purposes.

She replied that love's rhythm was not necessarily the rhythm of the passion of the moment. Fulfillment of love, to mean anything, had to flow out of the deepest wells of being and had to lead to enduring satisfaction.

Driven though she was by sex-hunger, she was not quite moved to her inner depths. Some inviolable corner of her he had not reached. A dark abyss still seemed to lie beyond the act he desired, no golden open road.

He was piqued to find she could argue so well. His vanity was irked that his kisses had not swept her off her feet. He had expected to dominate her easily, just as he dominated most human beings. This duality between her physical passion and her calm mental reactions disconcerted and angered him.

He considered he was condescending to offer his affection to Esperanza, hence was dumbfounded by the calmness of her resistance.

A less vain man might have been honored, but Lorenzo decided she must be physically cold, sluggish.

But her resistance excited him all the more—often the case with very vain men.

She insisted he must give her time. On the morrow she would go back to Milpa Verde to see her child. If then she felt the same way as now, she would hurry back. He must give her a week.

He drew back as though struck in the face. For a moment, angry words quivered on his lips—"She could go then and never come back!"—but they died away unuttered.

Esperanza, noting how sensitive he was beneath his arrogant manner, was flattered that he had held back his stinging words. She was more desirable to him than she had thought.

This self-control of his, when again he kissed her and pleaded, almost made her capitulate. She ached to give him what he desired. It seemed natural and simple and honest, but some force greater than herself prevented her surrender.

"If you do not give now, you will never come back," he said, gloomily.

She used the lever of his own vanity. "Have you no more faith in yourself and in me than that?"

He looked at her searchingly. He, who had been so masterful, suddenly seemed disconcerted.

But his natural arrogance immediately revived. Taking her two arms in a firm grasp, he said, "I shall be expecting you."

"Of course," she added, "if after I have gone you change your mind, you can send me a message. Do not feel I have any claim on you."

He swore he wanted her.

She left the following morning about seven o'clock.

They were all sorry to see her go—Peter, Paul, Judas and Check-Suit.

Bobo was particularly sad. He turned a handspring in front of her and bobbed up close before her.

"Don't take all our luck with you," he said, in a lugubrious tone of foreboding.

Lorenzo said good-bye with a hurt, smiling aloofness that cut her to the quick.

"I shall expect you back soon, very soon," he said, and turned away from her quickly.

XXXIII

As Esperanza went down the mountain, people were swarming up in greater numbers than ever.

She tried to close her nostrils against the stench. But the horror

of these final tragic scenes left her somewhat only when she had reached the lower trail.

All the way down, people stopped and crowded around her in droves to ask about Lorenzo, until finally when anyone spoke to her, she merely shook her head forbiddingly and hurried on.

At the foot of the first ravine, she met Toño riding up in his usual, gaudy costume, gaily weaving his handsome black horse from side to side with flicks of the reins. He had on a wide cartridge belt with silver braid and a pearl-handled revolver.

"Of all things! Of all things!" he exclaimed.

He turned sideways in his saddle to talk to her, his left foot stiff and straight in the stirrup. His horse patiently adjusted its footing to his shifted weight.

"This Lorenzo de Fé business is worth the trip, I take it," he said to her. "You look as though you had been changed into a goddess."

She told him about the camp, about Lorenzo, though without enlightening him how well she knew the healer.

After Toño went on, she said to herself. "Queer Toño. He's a man in a mist seeking something, not like most plodding humdrum people. A funny soul, always on the edge of some mystery."

Thereupon she took stock of herself. She had come, seeking some message for the future, like Toño in fact. She had expected to reach for some ideal, some faith. Instead, she had fallen into a man's arms. But she had also been offered a chance to serve.

She trotted into Amecameca plaza after dark. The lines of the houses were sharply defined against the moonlit sky, blue-cold in its luminosity.

Suddenly she felt weary, and the elation of the whole experience seemed to slip entirely away. She was like a straw sucked to flatness.

But she got warm coffee at a booth and, finding acquaintances, sat around a bonfire telling of the strange events on Peñescal.

Her listeners were all agog. It was late before she lay down on her mat.

When next morning she trotted into Milpa Verde, she suddenly felt peace, happiness. Home again!

Far from Milpa Verde, it had seemed as though she had been gone an eternity—years on years—so quickened had been her sensations. She had lived through so many experiences in so many brief moments. The horrors of the encampment had pulled the

veil back from a whole eternity of suffering. The tense love-making of Lorenzo had struck down into the eternities of her own soul. But now, here in Milpa Verde among ordinary scenes, the veils were drawn over her experiences again with that easy touch of things long familiar and loved. Now it seemed as though she had scarcely left.

Petra embraced her with little chirps. Pablo patted her shoulder. "Chickens always come home to roost. You are back soon."

Everyone was eager to hear about her trip, about Lorenzo de Fé. The villagers came in droves to talk to her. Miraculous cures, miraculous intervention, prayers to the gods of field, stream and village saints, had always been their main medicine chest.

Despite her joy at having Rosa in her arms again, Esperanza regretted she had not stayed on with him. She should have given herself to him whole-heartedly. His adventurous ways, his black, compelling eyes, his capable acting, even the lurking deviltry in him, called to her now. She ached to be in his arms, to feel his caresses and kisses. Physically his warm mouth, smooth, almost white skin, his quick, lithe body dominated her. Mentally he also dominated her. She needed a man with power. She was in love with him.

Esperanza told everybody she was going back to Peñascal with Rosa to help Lorenzo with the sick.

They stared incredulously. Pablo was astonished but praised her. "That's asking God and using the hammer at the same time."

Petra was tearful. But for Guadalupe, Esperanza became more than ever the glorious heroine. So she herself would like to be—free and courageous like her cousin.

The news galloped through the village.

Even more neighbors crowded in, awed, respectful. Esperanza felt the ignorant homage which made Lorenzo so self-assured and contemptuous of people.

Three days later, with an extra horse to carry her belongings, she again set out.

Just beyond Amecameca, she ran into Toño, riding down like a mad dervish, his horse covered with lather.

He brought shocking news which upset her plans. The authorities had run Lorenzo off of Peñascal.

All her thoughts hodgepodged. "Tell me —"

The authorities, said Toño, had decided—on the grounds of sanitation and because of troubled times—that conglomerations of

people were dangerous. More troops had come. Lorenzo had been taken into custody.

Toño described the scene. "A howl went up to the very heavens."

Many people had traveled clear across Mexico, even from foreign lands. The crowd of miserables grew frenzied at losing what they believed to be their only chance to become normal human beings again. They surged in fury toward the soldiers.

"A terrible scene!" said Toño, shaking his head. "The soldiers surrounding Lorenzo clicked their cartridges into place for action. More cavalry galloped up.

"I was right in the jam. Every moment, I expected the order to fire. The people were unarmed but frantic. Their lives meant nothing at that moment. They were determined to rescue their beloved Lorenzo at all costs. What a terrible thing!"

Toño mopped his brow nervously with a silk handkerchief. "All those sick people about to be mowed down in cold blood."

Esperanza waited, breathless.

He continued. "But at the crucial moment, Lorenzo spoke to the officer then stepped forward and held up his hand . . .

"Every man and woman stopped in his tracks . . .

"Lorenzo told them he was not being arrested. The government was merely temporarily suspending his efforts. No blood should be spilled. He would come back later and cure them all. In the meantime he would send out his thoughts to them so that they might be getting better. They must have patience . . .

"It was a noble speech," concluded Toño. "Everybody wept . . .

"All stood with bowed heads while he passed down the mountain side . . .

"Little by little the soldiers herded the people away . . .

"When I left, they were burning down the shacks—Look! —"

Even from Amecameca could be seen a cloud of dust and smoke.

Esperanza's heart sank as she pictured the cabin where they had spent so many hours happily over the board, where they had staged their little plays—now going up in flames.

"And where did they take him?" she asked.

"They put him on the Mexico City train, told him not to go back."

"And Bobo?"

"I looked high and low for him. Such a mob! . . . He disappeared."

Esperanza was frightfully upset. Lorenzo might be in real trouble, perhaps in jail, as María Teresa had been.

She must go to him at once. He had sent her no word not to come. It was her duty to go.

She raced back to Milpa Verde.

The news had proceeded her. Neighbors crowded about, asking for tidings.

Hurriedly she told them what she knew.

She was very tired, inclined to cry.

She spent the rest of the day sewing on her clothes and resorting her effects, so as to take only what was most indispensable. Rosa she could leave with Petra. There was a big stack of *fajas* and embroideries to sell to meet expenses.

Next morning at the Amecameca station, people were all excited, but not entirely over Lorenzo.

No one thought the train would ever reach Mexico City. The flames of revolution were again rising higher. General Obregón had descended on the capital with his wild Yaqui Indian battalions on the heels of departing Villistas and Zapatistas. He was preparing to move north in pursuit of Villa. The city, it was said, was in mad confusion.

But nothing now mattered to Esperanza except Lorenzo.

Fortunately nothing happened to their train. Despite Esperanza's impatience, the two hours' ride was soon over.

She took a cab for the only hostelry she knew—Hotel Lux. There she had gone with Luis. In some uncanny way she seemed to be retracing her life.

The city looked the same as always, busy, peaceful.

But as the cab turned into the Zócalo, cavalry went galloping down Francisco Madero street.

The Zócalo itself was oddly different. The cathedral and plaza looked strangely naked. Then she realized—the eucalyptus grove before the cathedral had been cut down. Its towers now rose straight up from the sun-baked earth.

Later she heard that Obregón had cut them down. People had been wrothful at the defilement. Some said he had done it to spite the population of Mexico City which detested him; others that he was afraid of sharpshooters; others that the soldiers merely wished wood for fires. Anyway the trees were gone.

She soon heard other terrible stories about Obregón. He had run all the priests out of town because they refused to fork over

money for the revolution. He had stabled horses in the cathedral. He had put prominent business men, who refused to pay his levy, to work sweeping streets.

The city was buzzing with excitement and uncertainty. That night she heard firing by drunken soldiers. Shooting affrays occurred every night in cafés and cabarets.

Somewhere in all this confusion was Lorenzo. Where? Would María Teresa know?

Esperanza hurried to her home.

The caretaker of the flats said she was still there but very ill.

Esperanza hurried in.

María Teresa was sick in bed, a mountain of flesh under dirty bedclothes.

"My good child!" cried María Teresa, overjoyed.

Esperanza leaned over and kissed her. "You are sick!" she cried.

María Teresa blubbered between smiles. "Yes, I'm going to die."

"No, no, that can't be. Who's caring for you?"

"I'm all alone. The wife of the caretaker comes in every little while to give me broth and see that I'm all right."

Esperanza scolded her, said she would get someone to be with her all the time.

Much as María Teresa's sickness grieved her, Esperanza's one aching thought was for Lorenzo. But how broach the subject?

She asked about Bobo.

María Teresa knew nothing. "Lorenzo—I heard—they let loose." She wriggled her mountainous shoulders. "I was hoping he would come to see me, but he didn't, the ungrateful wretch. I taught him all he knows."

"Anyway, I'm awfully glad they let him loose!" exclaimed Esperanza.

María Teresa looked at her sharply, then laughed slyly. "He's all right. He'll always be all right. He's that kind."

"I went up to Peñascal," Esperanza confessed.

Again María Teresa looked at her sharply.

Embarrassed, Esperanza traced lines on her knee with her finger.

María Teresa asked a hundred questions.

Esperanza told of his great influence over the mob.

"Yes," remarked María Teresa. "He has something uncanny

about him; almost, almost like a snake. Something that attracts the very birds. One can understand St. Francis after having known him."

Esperanza nodded. Her eyes filled. She grew restless. She had to find him right away.

"You are in love with him," charged María Teresa, cannily.

Esperanza nodded.

María Teresa laughed without jealousy. "He's lucky, but he won't have the sense to know it. Where are you living?" she asked. "Why don't you come here; that is, if you can stand a sick woman. It will save you rent."

"I will! I will!" cried Esperanza eagerly. "And I can look after you."

She felt as though she were proving her loyalty to Lorenzo in some way by caring for a sick person, and especially María Teresa. Also she wanted to ask her a lot of questions.

"Do come, then," said María Teresa, "and stay—stay—as long as you like."

Tired, she turned her face to the wall with a shudder that creaked the springs.

Everywhere, Esperanza made inquiries about Lorenzo, but without finding out where he lived. So, late that afternoon, she took her things from the Hotel Lux over to María Teresa's.

She stretched her straw mat in the opposite corner of the room.

María Teresa was horribly bloated. An ulcer had opened up one of her swollen legs, from which oozed out pus. The sore had to be washed and bound up daily. Esperanza took it upon herself to attend to all such disagreeable duties.

She decided, whatever the cost, that she had to get a doctor. She thought of Enrique Chávez. He must be very expensive if Caldwell had hired him, but she looked him up.

He was glad to see her and immediately inquired about Rosa.

She told him why she had come. "But I'm afraid I can't pay much."

"Don't worry about that," he said genially, and came with her that same evening to have a look.

After the examination, he took Esperanza out into the patio.

"I'm afraid it's hopeless. Just a matter of time—a month—four months—one never can be quite sure —"

She was upset. Chávez patted her arm to comfort her.

He came over frequently, and always stopped to chat with her. He asked her many questions about Milpa Verde.

"I'll go there sometime," he said. "I'd like to do a little scientific work there. Would you help me out?"

"I'd do anything," she said, eagerly.

She couldn't imagine what scientific work one could do in Milpa Verde; in fact she had only a vague notion what scientific work might be.

Chávez also found María Teresa very interesting, and on days when she was feeling well, asked her a thousand questions about the curative herbs she used.

Later in the patio, to Esperanza he said, wrinkling up the upper part of his nose—a curious habit he had—that he was writing a treatise on native medicine.

"My treating María Teresa is like carrying water to the sea," he remarked, "although, my dear Esperanza, I would, I must confess, prefer to be cured by myself than María Teresa."

XXXIV

Early the morning following her arrival, Esperanza had gone down to Mercedes market with her wares. The market was her best newspaper.

Sure enough, the chatter there concerned itself with two themes—Lorenzo and the revolution.

Esperanza asked everyone what had happened to Lorenzo, where he had gone.

No one could tell her. But later in the morning a woman who sold eggs said she had delivered some to Lorenzo's home.

Everyone crowded around for news. She had seen him only once; he lived on Havre street.

Immediately, though she had made only one small sale, Esperanza gathered up her wares and hurried back to the flat to take off her country dress and put on city clothes. She did her hair up nicely.

Lorenzo lived in a two-story apartment dwelling behind a high iron fence. Esperanza's heart sank. She was out of place here.

She rang the proper bell. Her heart pounded. She was trembling and faint.

The door opened. A flashy young woman, holding a long ivory cigarette holder, puffed smoke out of her thin nostrils and asked Esperanza what she wanted.

"I must see Lorenzo."

The woman let her jeweled hand, with the cigarette holder, fall disdainfully by her side. "Oh, you mean Señor Romero, I presume," she said, chidingly, looking Esperanza up and down.

The woman's face, though young and pretty, was jaded, heavy with rouge, black around the eyes, the eyebrows plucked to a thin high circular line. "I'm sorry," she drawled. "He's not seeing people now. He's not curing."

Esperanza—afraid the woman would shut the door—said hurriedly: "I didn't come to get cured. I'm an old friend of his. I must see him about something important."

"Your name?—Wait a minute." The young woman glided off with a rustle of silk.

After a bit she came back. Without speaking a word, but with a displeased air, she opened the door for Esperanza. Looking her over again languidly, the woman nodded toward the parlor and disappeared noiselessly.

Esperanza went into the over-furnished room. Large old-fashioned, dark red drapes cloaked long French windows. The furniture had typical gold scrolled, red upholstered awkwardness, but to Esperanza it all looked—if strange—very impressive.

Footsteps. Her heart bounded.

But it was not Lorenzo. Again a rustle of silk. The woman glided back, hips and breasts sinuous, a movement perhaps learned from looking at moving picture actresses.

With a jerky motion of her sleek head, she said coldly, "Señor Romero asks you to wait about ten minutes."

She laid her long ivory cigarette holder down on a marble top, then picked it up again, her hand shaking. She drew down the corners of her mouth and glided off again.

After a bit, Esperanza heard the woman call in an affected high-pitched tone, "Lorenzo, darling —"

So . . . the creature called him "darling."

Presently Lorenzo's vibrant voice filled the hallway with petulance. "I don't care—" Footsteps.

He entered in a purple dressing gown, came forward with both hands outstretched. "Esperanza, my darling. When did you get here?" But, for all his cordiality, there was no real warmth.

She told him her own experiences, of her fears for his safety.

"You have a heart of gold, Esperanza." He looked around cautiously.

They talked, but he seemed to recede from her more and more. She realized, as she might have expected, he had no need for her here in the city.

She felt empty and hopeless. Her eyes filled. Hastily, she asked about Bobo.

Lorenzo answered indifferently. "He disappeared in the confusion of the mountain top."

She choked. Doubting her ability to conceal her emotions, she rose hurriedly to go.

"I'm glad—" she said, not looking at him, "that, that everything is all right with you."

"Ah," he cleared his throat. "I appreciate your coming. I want to see you again soon."

He said this in a low voice and glanced over his shoulder. "Of course, I'm terribly busy. How can I get in touch with you?—No phone—that's unfortunate. Suppose, then, we make it a week from yesterday, Thursday, in front of the cathedral, say five o'clock. Yes, yes—of course I must see you—I want to see you—I'm sorry I can't make it any sooner—Fine —"

He took her hands again, beaming cordially and gently propelled her to the door. He made not the slightest effort to kiss her, and seemed relieved when she departed.

In the street she suddenly felt faint and leaned against a wall. She asked nothing from him. It was quite all right if he were no longer interested in her. Yet she felt let down. Like a pricked balloon, and angry at herself for having been such a simpleton.

Fully five minutes before the appointed time to meet Lorenzo, Esperanza was in front of the cathedral.

All week she had been furious, excited, eager. One minute she had sworn to herself she wouldn't meet him. The next she was quivering to see him.

Twenty minutes now passed.

She paced nervously. So he was not coming? His appointment had been merely a ruse to get her out of the house quietly.

She was angry and bitter. Who was the woman who had opened the door and had called him, "Lorenzo, darling"?

Then unexpectedly he appeared.

He was at once warmer, more tender toward her than at the previous meeting. He apologized effusively for having kept her waiting.

They strolled through the streets. His eloquence inundated her

again with strange ideas about the universe and human beings and his arrogant rôle among them. He planned, as soon as he could raise the money, to start a real healing center. He would need her.

She was reassured, happy.

They went into a little restaurant and had beer.

He told her more of his grandiose plans. Not only would he heal the sickness of Mexico, but he would bring to his country a new spiritual message. She would help him, always she was to be his helper.

For the moment, though, he could do nothing for lack of funds.

She pondered about this, for he had charged for his healing in Peñascal. Though most had been poor devils, some had surely paid handsomely.

She pocketed her pride and asked about the woman who had opened the door.

"Oh," he said easily. "You know, I'm living with my cousin's family at present."

He did not suggest that she meet his relatives. Putting his hand on her arm, he leaned toward her, eyes glistening and kissed her. She melted inside.

He talked of their love and made a thousand protestations.

She wanted to believe all he told her, but doubts bristled in her mind. It seemed incredible, good-looking though she was, that he should interest himself seriously in her, his social inferior.

He waved his long, slim hand airily in answer to her doubts. "It is true you come from a humble environment, but the fact that you have been closer to poor people will be of great assistance to me."

They kissed again, finally went out.

It was dark now. The streets here were ill-lighted. But the lights in the little shops winked at her in friendly fashion. The night was balmy. She was happy.

He squeezed her arm, in darker corners put his arm about her protectingly, several times gave her a quick kiss. Her pulses pounded.

They passed a little hotel with a white globe over the door.

"We will go in here," he said with finality, starting to lead her in.

Her heart dropped into her feet. She drew back. "No, no, I can't —"

"Come, don't be silly," he said, in a high and mighty tone.

She looked at him searchingly. "If all you have said is true, then we don't need to slip into dark, little hotels in back streets."

He was piqued. "You are always the same. You don't really love me. You only want to get everything you can out of me."

Her eyes filled. "How can you talk that way. What have I tried to get out of you?"

"If you really loved me, you would not quibble so much."

How could he find things so simple as all that? She made him move away from the entrance and, nearby in the dark, she said slowly:

"Somehow, I cannot disassociate our love from the actual doing of the things you have told me. I can't explain very well, and I suppose you will be angered, but —"

He jerked away from her. "You women are all sentimental idiots."

"Lorenzo —"

"Oh, bother anyway!" He strode off brusquely.

For a moment she was dazed, then pain and fear overwhelmed her.

"Lorenzo!" she cried, and ran after him and caught up with him. Why did he humiliate her?

He merely strode along angrily, nose in air.

Running at his side, she pled with him to see the matter more justly. And so, he silent, she doing the talking now, they reached the Zócalo again.

"We might as well part here," he said, coldly.

She stiffened. "Good night, then," she told him quietly.

"Listen!" He turned to her roughly. "I'm a busy person. I have to work like the devil to bring about the things I've told you about, and I can't waste time this foolish way. Since you care for me so little, I shouldn't see you at all. However, let's make it next Thursday at the same hour."

A week off. "Whenever it is convenient to you, Lorenzo."

"But under one condition, that you agree to be reasonable, to do what I wish."

She felt faint. What he asked was a major violation of her sentiments. But weakly she said, "I'll try, Lorenzo."

She turned away, tears in her eyes and ran through the dark to María Teresa's place.

He stood looking after her, with a half-mocking expression.

All week, Esperanza was hot and cold, nervous, frightened, glad, hopeful, a medley of emotions. She wished Rosa were with her.

Thursday morning she went down to the Peravillo railroad tracks, where she and Luis had lived, to see Julia, the good neighbor who had acted as midwife.

Esperanza stood on the embankment, overlooking the tiny shanty town with its fetid pool of water, and was struck with sadness, for she had been happy those troubled days, though now it seemed horrible that any one should be obliged to live in such filth.

She picked her way through the rubbish, gradually adjusting her recollections. The huts had changed. Julia's place must be over there.

Of an emaciated youth, she asked about her former neighbor.

"Yes, Señorita, over there. She is very sick."

Making her way through the mud and garbage, Esperanza reached the door and called.

No answer.

Pushing aside the burlap curtain, she adjusted her sight to the dim interior.

Lying on a mat and pile of rags was her old friend.

She knelt beside her. "You are ill, dear Julia."

The woman's glassy eyes puzzled, then shone with recognition.

"Very ill, my daughter. And—and your little Rosa?"

"Well and strong, mother dear."

"I'm glad. My own child died." The woman's hand moved feebly. Her face contorted with pain. She moaned.

"You are in pain, mother dear."

The woman groaned. "Everlasting pain, my child. I am burning up. I cannot stand the weight of even a blanket. To suffer the cold is better than the pain of its weight." She moaned again.

Flies walked over her and the rags. They buzzed in swarms. The hut stank terribly.

Esperanza was nauseated. "What can I do for you, mother dear?"

"It is a bright light that you have come to see me. I die happier knowing that you have remembered me."

A sob rose in Esperanza's throat. "Have you eaten?"

"Nothing for two days. But that doesn't matter."

"I shall get you some broth."

Picking her way back through the filth, Esperanza went to a little Chinese restaurant, where she got a pot of chicken broth. At a street stand, she bought a bunch of carnations.

She fed the hot broth to the sick woman, spoon by spoon. Julia smacked her lips. It made her feel much better.

Esperanza put what was left on the brazier. "Your man can heat it for you when he comes in. I have to go now." She patted the wasted hand lying on the mat. "I'll come tomorrow again."

Esperanza went away crying. But in the afternoon she would speak to Lorenzo and ask him to help Julia.

As Dr. Chávez had flatly refused to take any money for his services to María Teresa, Esperanza did not feel that she could impose on him further for the present.

Also, the idea that Lorenzo could do something made Esperanza halfway happy. She felt that such a deed, in a way, would consecrate their union. Julia was not a case for the laying on of hands, but he could get her to a more comfortable place.

And so Esperanza had two sick women on her shoulders. But she was glad to forget her own petty interests.

Nearly home, she met, of all persons, Toño. Not in his gaudy charro outfit but in city clothes, he did not look so dashing, rather ordinary in fact, his small, dark face, with its vague expression seemed weak, the puzzled features of a man always thinking queer thoughts, wondering about things rather than doing.

After their cordial greetings, he said abruptly. "I saw you walking with Lorenzo de la Fé last week. That man is a low scoundrel."

"That can't be," said Esperanza, staunchly.

"It can't? If you knew what I know—He took me for a ride."

"I thought you considered him a great healer."

"A great healer! Ha! A great thief! He robbed me of twelve hundred pesos. He's a nasty thief and scoundrel."

Incredulous, Esperanza shook her head. "There are two sides to every story."

Toño was incensed. "Think so? You are my friend. Be careful of that man."

"Why do you say that?"

He hesitated. "It's something I just can't tell you. But he made a sucker out of me in an old badger game."

"Toño, I'm fond of you, but I also know him. He means a great deal to me."

"A great deal to you!" Toño looked at her thunderstruck.

Thoughtfully he drew his toe along a crack. "I—" He hesitated again. "I wouldn't tell a soul, but—" he hesitated again. "Well, once I told you how grateful I am for your having saved my life. Perhaps I can repay you now, although the whole thing is very humiliating to me."

He laughed sourly and went on. "Here I, Antonio de la Selva, a man of the world, got nipped prettily. An old, old racket. I couldn't afford the scandal because of my family, and besides I—I want to marry my cousin —"

"Your cousin! You don't mean Marta Sandoval?"

He nodded. "She's marvelous. Only she doesn't give me the slightest encouragement. And, of course, a nasty story like this —"

He drew his toe along the crack again. "It's silly, but—well, about a month ago, about two weeks before I went up to Peñascal, I met a dashing woman—it was when Marta, angry at me, had told me not to bother her any more. This woman was good looking, and I took her around. I was blue and needed company. I wasn't in love with her, but—well—to make a long story short, she turned out to be Lorenzo's wife."

"Lorenzo's wife!" ejaculated Esperanza. "What does she look like?"

Toño described her. It was none other than the one who had opened the door for Esperanza.

An abyss yawned at her feet.

Toño continued in a desperate tone. "She never told me who she really was or that she was married. She was merely playing a game to trap me so Lorenzo could catch us in a compromising situation.

"He burst in on us, gun in hand, threatened to shoot me, then to arrest me. That was last week. Oh, he threw a fine act. He demanded money. I paid. I paid through the nose. I don't mind the money so much, but I hate to think of myself as an infantile sucker. And that, my dear Esperanza, is your great saint and healer."

Esperanza told Toño how sorry she was and thanked him.

She walked on to María Teresa's in a daze. She could not believe what she had heard. Yet what motive did Toño have to tell her a falsehood?

Dr. Chávez was at the flat when she got there.

"This case of María Teresa is very strange. Frankly, I thought she'd be done for by this time. But she seems almost as strong as when I first came. She has amazing vitality."

He paused, embarrassed. "I—I'm wondering how you are getting along—I mean—for money."

She was touched. As if giving his time and knowledge were not sufficient!

"I've managed so far," she replied. "A thousand thanks."

Embarrassed herself now, she brought up the subject of Lorenzo de la Fé.

"All I know," said Chávez, "is what I've read in the papers. He strikes me as an evil fakir, living off the misfortunes of others. Pyschosis—I mean the mental condition of patients—is very important in all healing. But to utilize purely suggestion with no proper medical approach is criminal. There might be a rare case where that is all that is needed. But the people who go up there believe in magic. There is, believe me, dear Esperanza, though your people are raised to think differently, utterly no such thing as magical healing. Sometimes science fails, sometimes a fakir might even hit upon a cure where science had made a mistake, but even in the case of such accidents, there is a scientific explanation. But you aren't going to get cured, unless your disease is a mental neurosis, by praying to saints or listening to any Lorenzo. And even in the case of neuroses, there are always physical factors which can be improved. Lorenzo, I'm sure, is at least ninety-five per cent crook."

She did not tell him that she knew Lorenzo well and loved him even if he was a fakir. But his words, added now to those of Toño, upset her doubly.

XXXV

This time, Lorenzo was punctual in meeting Esperanza. He was dressed foppishly, with a gold-headed cane and pearl-gray gloves, his face aglow with eagerness.

He took her arm in a proprietary fashion, too elated by his success with her, to notice her preoccupation.

She told him of Julia. "We have to do something for her."

He was irritated. "Of course, of course. But here I am thinking of our love, and you bring up outside matters. Why should you spoil the afternoon this way?" he demanded, petulantly.

She was amazed that he was so callous, but said gently. "I'm

sorry. I did not think that this interfered with our love. Julia once helped me greatly, and her sad condition weighs on me. I can't think of my own pleasure while knowing she is in trouble. To do something for her, the both of us together, would make me love you all the more."

He could not put aside his petulance. "I told you I have no money just now. And no time either. My project to get a healing center started keeps me working night and day. And here you bother me with an individual case.

"Besides, you tell me there is no hope for the old woman. She would probably be merely more uncomfortable some place else."

Why should Lorenzo be so irritated? . . . Esperanza persisted. She could not leave any stone unturned to help Julia. This was a real test. Lorenzo could and should help.

"Something could be done," she said, as quietly as before, "by a proper doctor to alleviate her great pain."

He felt this as a subtle criticism of his own therapeutic powers. "If I can't do anything, a doctor can't either," he exploded.

"But as you won't—" She bit her lip. Her eyes filled.

Suddenly she remembered how indifferent he had been about Bobo's fate.

They walked along silently, then he took her arm gaily. "Come, Esperanza, let's put disagreeable matters out of our mind for this little moment of happiness. Afterwards we'll see what we can do."

Pain welled up in her, but he did not notice her feelings.

Leaning tenderly over her and talking, masterfully he guided her along the sidewalk in the direction of the shabby hotel.

Panic seized her. Could he think of nothing better than this?

Unconcerned by her silence, which he considered only natural, he grew still more happy.

But suddenly she pulled away from him. "I've really been hurt by your attitude, but if you promise that you will do something tonight or early tomorrow —"

"Of course, I promise, Esperanza, love," he said readily.

In part his previous irritation had been acting. He considered her interest in Julia as merely womanly subterfuge to evade the sex issue at hand, her last resistance before final capitulation—women were like that. And so now he promised readily so as to remove all possibility of her drawing back. He congratulated himself on his psychic understanding of the sex.

But in his moment of self congratulation, she said sternly, "There is something else I must talk to you about."

Chagrin flickered across his face.

Seeing a small restaurant across the street, she said, "Suppose we go in here for a moment until —"

In a low, tense voice, he raged, "Why do you always put me off? You promised—pretexts—pretexts —"

"This is not a pretext—" she said calmly.

He still tried to fool himself. It's not dark yet. That's why she won't go to the hotel.

At the same time, weary indifference suddenly overtook him, as it often does when men are seeking a sex object without real love. Why the hell, he asked himself, am I bothering with this woman anyway?

Reading his expression, Esperanza was afraid that, as the week before, he would walk off. The knowledge that she still loved him so much frightened her.

Observing that he had so much power over her and that victory must be near, he became more agreeable. His interest revived as suddenly as it had expired. She was really too good looking to let slip. Besides the idea of failure bruised his ego.

"All right," he said, with forced gaiety. "My sweet darling shall have her own sweet way. If I'm so ill-humored, it is just because I want you so much. You see that, don't you?"

When they were seated, she repeated all that Toño had told her.

He quivered sharply, became arrogant again. "I can see that you swallow his cock and bull story."

"No, I don't believe it. Only I feel that you should know about it. Such talk is not good."

"You do believe it," he blustered, "or you wouldn't have insisted on bringing it up before we went to the hotel." But his face had a trapped look.

"It should be cleared up," she insisted quietly.

Regaining his composure, he looked down his nose at her. Viciously he lit a cigarette. "The truth is, your so-called friend De la Selva was molesting my cousin. I had to drive him off."

"She's not your wife then?" Esperanza looked searchingly to and fro in his face.

He assumed an injured air. "What nonsense! You believe anything the first scoundrel tells you. You are sillier than I thought."

She let that pass. She knew he was lying in whole or in part.

He puffed out smoke nervously. "The truth is that when I was driven off of Peñascal, I gave Toño twelve hundred pesos to keep for me. My other followers took other amounts. Why one took ten thousand pesos! Every one faithfully brought me the sums they owed except your De la Selva. Finally, I went to his place and forced him to give it to me at the point of the gun. The fellow is a wishy-washy coward. I suppose you think what I did was improper," Lorenzo ended in a scornful tone.

Esperanza tried to read the truth behind his mask-like face. Had Toño really had some sort of disagreement with Lorenzo that had made him spitefully distort the facts? But would Toño invent something so derogatory for himself? She spoke slowly:

"All the others, you say, gave you back the money?"

"Naturally!" he exploded. "Don't you think you have pried enough into my private affairs?"

"Forgive me," she said wearily. "I just happened to recall that you told me you had absolutely no money. That was the reason you have to live with your cousin. I was feeling sorry for you."

Cornered, he sputtered angrily. "I haven't any money compared to what I need. Can't you understand at all?"

Now, having been caught in one lie, he tried eloquently to persuade her that everything else was true. Inwardly he was angered that she did not merely look up and worship him, but he stroked her hand affectionately.

She did not feel the slightest thrill from his caress. She remained perplexed, doubtful.

Again her silence encouraged him. He repeated endearing phrases, grew bolder, said he would do anything and everything for Julia. "Was your promise a promise, Esperanza?"

"It was, but —"

Before she could finish her sentence, he clapped for the bill and took her outside, tender, solicitous, commanding.

She was amazed. She had thought him cunning. But with her, certainly, he was utterly obtuse.

On the sidewalk, she paused. "You did not let me finish my sentence. All these things so puzzled me that I was upset. You have not been very gentle."

Her sensible frankness disconcerted him. He struck his cane sharply on the sidewalk. "I came here in a loving mood and suddenly everything is sidetracked. But I'm sorry if I was hasty. Let's

be close in each other's arms and forget about everything unpleasant."

She drew back. "I—I can't just now."

He grew haughty. "You seem to have no comprehension how much time my affairs take —"

While they were talking, a lottery ticket vender, a lanky, dirty-faced, bare-foot street waif in rags, had been shoving the bright colored strips of paper before them, whining.

"Go away, I don't want any," said Lorenzo sharply.

He and Esperanza continued talking, but the boy, driven by his hunger, kept importuning Lorenzo.

Angered, Lorenzo struck the lad's shins sharply with his cane.

The boy danced back with a sharp cry of pain. Holding his shin, from a little distance he yelled filth at Lorenzo.

"How could you!" exclaimed Esperanza.

She rushed over to the lad, knelt down and threw her arms about him.

"Don't do that!" exploded Lorenzo in her ear. "He's just a dirty little brat —"

Esperanza opened her purse and gave the lad a coin.

He looked up at her through his tears, his peaked face wreathed in astonishment. "Gee, thanks—" he gulped. "Thanks —"

Suddenly, confused, he dashed off.

Lorenzo took her arm roughly. "You seem bent on humiliating me. After that kid annoyed us for half an hour, you take his part. A little blow on the shins was exactly what he needed."

Esperanza, choking, broke away from him and ran down the street.

"Esperanza!" he called, utterly astonished.

But she did not stop or look around or answer, and presently, panting, found herself home.

In the outer room where María Teresa would not hear or see her, she sank down and wept as though her heart would break.

A voice seemed to say to her, "Don't take after strange gods."

She remembered having wept this way once before, and how Bobo's face had been hatcheted between the bars of the Big House. "Ride north . . . Ride north . . . Fire and smoke . . . Stone in the flesh —"

She rose and tended to María Teresa.

PART IV



BLOOD FOR CORN

IV

BLOOD FOR CORN

XXXVI

THE great bells of the cathedral were rolling over the city.
A new "savior" was coming to the City of Palaces.

He had walked over the sea of passions; he had stepped forth from the fire of war.

The great bells of the cathedral rolled over the City of Palaces.
Flags! Flowers! Sunlight! Soldiers! Bayonets! Bells! People!
No one present saw the smoke! No one saw the blood!

For years the smoke had curled into the sky like incense before the altars of Mexico's mighty mountains.

The blood had all seeped into the thirsty plains.

Now there were only bells and sunlight and flowers —

With the rest, Esperanza ran to see the procession.

Crowds! Great crowds everywhere. The bells ringing. People shouting themselves hoarse.

Venustiano Carranza was coming back to town. He had whipped the mighty Pancho Villa; or rather his cunning general, Alvaro Obregón, had whipped Villa.

For weeks in the Mercedes market, besides all the chatter about ordinary things: sickness—a perpetual theme—troubles with husbands and children, sales, prices, there had come red rumors from the north. The terrible battle of Celaya had been fought, and Villa—the great Villa of whom José had often talked with such reverence—had been driven north, his troops scattered like chaff.

Where was José?

Weeks had rolled by. More rumors. News of other battles, smoke and dust and human beings in the crannies of death. Villa was done, smashed.

Where was José?

Esperanza hadn't the slightest idea, but she ran to the procession to see Venustiano Carranza return to town—victorious.

So many flags and flowers and people! Esperanza decided he must be really as great as Madero.

The new savior rode in an auto instead of a carriage. Like a grandfather behind his long white beard and his blue spectacles, stiffer even than Madero, he scarcely acknowledged the joyous shouting but rode down the street like a frozen statue. A patriarch in marble.

Now the bells boomed. A new savior. The bells boomed.

Men had died. People had suffered. A new savior, but people still lived in slimy sloughs.

Esperanza thought of Julia.

The morning following her break with Lorenzo, Esperanza had gone out to the railroad banks. A strange sight had met her eyes.

The poor beggars were falling on Julia's hut like a swarm of locusts. In a trice they had ripped it apart and had seized every piece of tin and burlap and matting.

Shocked, Esperanza watched, as they shoved and swarmed and yelled.

Julia had died the previous afternoon, about the time of Esperanza's fuss with Lorenzo. The authorities had already carted the body away. As her husband said he was leaving, the neighbors had at once fallen on his hut.

Esperanza went away sadly, upbraiding herself.

Now there were bells and a new savior.

Esperanza wished little Rosa was with her to see it all—something to talk about later in life. Esperanza's heart ached more than ever to get back to Milpa Verde.

As she walked toward town through the thinning throngs, she caught sight of a familiar figure in big slouch hat and bandanna.

"José! José!" she shrieked.

Laughing, crying, they hugged each other. Then she screamed. "Your eye, José!"

He laughed easily. "A close shave. Yes, it's gone—for good. But the other one is perfectly all right. I can see a scoundrel twice as far with it."

One eye was scarred and whitish. It gave him a leering look. She was horrified. "You were wounded!"

"Forget it," he said gruffly.

He had grown stouter, his face more moon-like, his big hat more rakish.

"Have you heard?" he cried. "Carranza has decreed lands to the peasants. Milpa Verde will get its old communal lands back. I've quit fighting. I'm going back to Milpa Verde."

"José! I'm glad! We can be together. Will you stay home? Does this mean peace?" Questions tumbled out of her.

"Exactly all that." He squeezed her arm. "We'll all have a chance to work and live honestly. No one will put the lash to our backs again."

The world seemed brighter to Esperanza than for many a day.

"Do you know," continued José, "that after Madero was assassinated, Rufo had to skip out to keep from getting killed by Huerta, so he ran off and joined Zapata. I saw him a lot."

"I'll never trust him!" exploded Esperanza.

José shrugged. "Just now he's on the right side. And say, is he a devil of a fighter. Afraid of nothing!"

At the flat, sick though she was, María Teresa brightened up on seeing José—she liked people about. She invited him to stay with them.

José was very busy, seeing government people to have them fulfill the agreement on which his group had dispersed to their homes. Guns had been promised to a few trusted people in each of the villages to maintain order and guarantee popular rights. But now the authorities were very evasive.

"Don't return to Milpa Verde without them," urged Esperanza fiercely. "Remember Luis. Go back to the hills and fight."

"Exactly what I intend to do," said José grimly.

Strangely enough, it was Rufo who at once got a new foothold with the Carranza government and who now helped José to get the guns. Rufo, working hard to build a labor and agrarian party, this time wanted his support based on real rifles.

Again his help irked Esperanza. "The man gets his fingers in everywhere," she remarked dourly.

In his free moments, José sat with Esperanza at the sunny door of the patio. He told her of his experiences in Morelos with the Zapatistas—not everything, for there had been terrible brutalities, women raped, drunken brawls, but mostly a glorious camaraderie of dashing over mountains then dropping down on some unsuspecting garrison in a rattle of bullets and shouts.

Nor did he tell her of the time he lay wounded on a hot bank in the cane brakes, his eye gone, the socket a crushed mass of flesh and splintered bone, the sun scorching him, the flies and gnats

torturing him, his mouth dry like rough leather, a chorus of cursing, wounded men all about him, and far off firing. His very brain was frying, and a branding iron ran along his head, back and forth, back and forth.

Buzzards whirled down with astonishing speed, wings balanced and effortless, a scarcely audible sound of motion, and sat patiently. They stood all around, coffin-black, shoulders hunched, necks bare and gray, eyes blinking out of their red, gory heads, beaks dirty. They moved lazily, fearlessly.

Awakening, he had let out a fearful scream, but it scarcely frightened them.

An Indian woman dragged him to her hut. He got well.

Now, Esperanza was eager to go with José back to Milpa Verde; but having gotten the guns, he could not wait for her, and she could not leave María Teresa, weaker now than ever.

One afternoon, about a month later, María Teresa spoke to her feebly. "I'm going to die soon now. Under my pillow is the key to the little chest. When I die, put me in my black, silk dress and let me wear the long, gold earrings with the stones in them, and the necklace with the gold locket. It has a picture of my mother and father, and—of Lorenzo. You will find a bag of silver, more than enough to bury me, and get a little stone engraved and some left over for you. It is yours. No one else needs it. I love you, Esperanza."

Later in the day, she called Esperanza. "Open the chest, I want to be sure everything is there."

There was the jewelry, also other jewelry María Teresa said she could have, and a big bag of silver, so heavy Esperanza could scarcely lift it.

"There will be plenty," said María Teresa contentedly, "and a little dot for Rosa. Bring the package wrapped up in paper and cloth."

Esperanza opened it out beside the sick woman. Inside were small cloth bundles. Each in turn, Esperanza unrolled.

"These are good herbs," explained María Teresa. "Take a pencil and mark them . . . This is to calm stomach pains . . . This is to be burned and breathed for throat and lungs . . . This—and now your husband is dead you may need it—is an abortion herb, very effective."

Dr. Chávez came that evening and gave María Teresa an

injection. He shook his head gravely, as he stood with Esperanza for a moment in the moonlight in the patio.

"She thinks she's going to die," said Esperanza.

Chávez replied that it might be tonight or tomorrow—any time. "She's lucky to have a friend like you to see her through. You are a remarkable woman, Esperanza."

She passed his praise off with a laugh because she felt a sob rising in her throat on account of María Teresa.

"By the way," remarked Chávez, "what has happened to that girl that used to come around to see Caldwell's baby? Marta—Marta —"

"Sandoval."

"Yes, yes. She was a stunning creature, wasn't she?"

Esperanza said she had not seen her for a long time.

"You know," continued Chávez, "she sort of stuck in my mind. I'd really like to see her again some day." . . .

María Teresa died quietly the following morning.

Esperanza bathed her body and put on the black dress and fastened the earrings in the cold, brittle ears and slipped the locket about her suety neck and had her all ready.

Tearfully she saw María Teresa lowered into the ground, then went over to Luis' grave in the paupers' field. She swore, as soon as she could, to have his body moved.

Now she would go back to Milpa Verde. After what José had told her, there would be no reason ever to leave there again.

She hunted for Matilda to tell her she also ought to go back—now there would be lands for everybody. After many inquiries she finally obtained an address in the cheap Niño Perdido district.

She walked out San Juan de Letrán, past old churches and remains of the colonial aqueduct. Mistakenly she turned left on Cuatemotzín street.

Garish women in bright dresses sat in all the doorways. Some were smoking. One was seated with fat legs crossed, showing garters and skin. Soldiers and men loitered about. She heard coarse laughter, and from behind a closed door, with a little wooden slide window, raucous drunken singing.

Esperanza realized that this was the street of evil women of which she had heard.

She hurried on, face averted, pulling her *tápalo* tightly about her flushed cheeks. But she could not help stealing side glances.

Some women, in bright dresses, exaggerated jewelry and

make-up, were young and pretty, others were pathetically haggard. Through the open doorways, beds were visible, walls covered with pictures, some obscene, along with Christian images and saints.

A familiar face almost made her stop.

It was Henriette, Joaquín's mistress—a proud, haughty Henriette, leaning nonchalantly against a door jamb, smoking. Her heavy rouged face was flaccid. Her body had not lost all its slim grace, but under her thin, silk dress, caught tightly at the waist, could be seen bulges of fat.

Esperanza would have liked to talk with her, but shame drove her by with averted countenance.

At the corner saloon, a lounging male, with a drawn ashen face and a lavender kerchief cascading from his breast pocket, dropped into step beside her.

She dashed around the corner like a frightened deer, panting and thankful, but her face still burning with shame.

She did not find Matilda, so she went to see the Sandovals.

Portly Señora Sandoval again oozed out of a portly doorway. Marta, more dazzlingly beautiful than ever, came with a rush of open enthusiasm, not as though Esperanza were a social inferior.

Esperanza remarked that Dr. Chávez had asked about her.

"I remember him. He's a nice man, isn't he? But he was so serious at times, he used to make me laugh."

Esperanza also told how she had seen Toño several times.

"Yes, yes!" exclaimed Marta, impatiently.

She spoke of Caldwell. He had written that now Mexico was settling down, he expected to return to salvage the Estrella estate. Winifred was fine.

"He loves her far more than his other child," remarked Marta. Her eyes filled with tears.

Poor girl, thought Esperanza, she's as much in love with him as ever.

Esperanza also went to see Señora de la Selva . . . the panelled room . . . the same rustle of taffeta . . . the same frozen cordiality.

Esperanza gave her a little present of embroidery.

The widow thawed, but looked sad when Esperanza told her she was going back to Milpa Verde.

"We have suffered so much and so unjustly in this revolution.

I have had no income from the estate since my husband was killed."

Esperanza was all solicitude.

The widow continued. "Those murderous bands! Have you heard about this terrible new law taking away our lands? But I have a new majordomo, Señor Montesinos. He will teach people their places." Her thin lips set bitterly.

Esperanza wanted to say that the hacienda had originally stolen the lands from the village; but why argue?

Her silence caused the widow to look at her sharply. Again she froze over.

Esperanza left. Her pity had all evaporated. She was saying to herself fiercely, the village should take the lands and hold them, hold them.

XXXVII

Esperanza got off the train in Amecameca on a warm, spring day. Bobo was sitting on a railway tie, chin in hand, staring at nothing at all.

She called excitedly.

His big face broke into a grin. He shuffled over to her.

"What are you doing here, Bobo, dear?"

"The coyotes are not running in packs this year."

"I'm going to Milpa Verde. Won't you come with me?"

He nodded and trotted along beside her, past the mill to the plaza.

She made a few purchases in Don Griseldo's store and a few at a new place two doors down. The name suddenly struck her—"Alfarez."

The young man waiting on her, with a hard, thin but agreeable if shrewd face, was evidently Pepita's husband.

As Esperanza picked up her wares, Pepita herself pushed through a calico curtain over a rear doorway. Out of the corner of her eye, Esperanza watched her.

Pepita was no longer attractive. Her face now somewhat gross, the body heavy, her youthful flare of flirtatiousness gone completely.

Arrived in Milpa Verde, Esperanza immediately sensed subtle changes—menace in the very air. What was it?

She and Bobo climbed up by San Benito church. Eduardo de Negri, once so attentive to her, was perched on a wall, a rifle

across his back, a red flower behind his ear and a cigarette in his mouth.

"A new rôle for you, Eduardo."

He nodded. "I'm constable now."

"And the sheriff?"

Eduardo sniffed and spat. "Things have changed. Milpa Verde is no longer part of the hacienda. It's a free village."

"Then it has lands?"

"Provisionally."

Her heart bounded. "Good-bye, Eduardo."

"Go with God," he growled.

She went thoughtfully on down the hill—Lands!—Then Pablo would have a share. And José. Perhaps herself . . . No longer would there be long weeks when they would have to eat cactus and roots, when even cinnamon tea could not be afforded.

Excited, she decided to come into Pablo's by the hacienda side. She cut down a steep side lane across the wash where José had fled years before, and came out at the grange.

Her eyes bulged. Over the nearest flat-roofed warehouse was a big new sign:

MUNICIPAL PALACE OF MILPA VERDE

Over the three open doors were: "Mayor," "Secretary," "Town Court." Men were sitting at desks.

Out of the court door, somewhat rheumatically but venerably, came gray-bearded Alvaro, the saint-carver, his small eyes seemingly angry and bloodshot.

He had been strenuously writing some document, gummed with a ladder of bright-colored revenue stamps. Now, he pushed his steel specs out of his bleary eyes to his ratty, white hair above his low wrinkled brow and waddled into the sunlight where he stood blinking and groaning. Slowly he waved the document to and fro to dry the ink. Apparently the new "Municipality of Milpa Verde" had no appropriation for blotting paper.

"He's an owl! He's an owl!" cried Bobo, gleefully.

Such changes! Esperanza hurried on home to hear about it all.

She passed her grandparents' old place. There Pepe had worked on his cross—if only he were alive to see all this! And Luis! Her eyes blurred.

She hastened down the cactus and chayote lane to Pablo's stone-walled house.

Guadalupe rushed out with a happy squeal and pulled her off her horse and hugged her.

"My baby! My baby! Where is my baby!" cried Esperanza, then spied Rosa by the doorstep playing with spools.

Esperanza caught the child to her.

Rosa kicked and screamed at being yanked violently from her play. Then something familiar struck her. She twisted her head about and laughed and threw her arms around Esperanza's neck.

"Why, she's grown, even in this short time!"

"We have to keep an eye on her. She's always running off."

Esperanza went back and helped Bobo off his horse, for he had remained motionless, staring over the fields toward the volcanoes, a vague pleased expression on his face.

Guadalupe was shouting, "Mother! Mother! Esperanza is back!"

Petra came running, and young Pablo and Toña. Presently Pablo trudged up the lane, a rude hoe over his shoulder. He wiped his mouth with the back of his hand and grinned broadly. "The shortest road for the mare is the home road."

Petra soon had hot manzanilla tea ready, and Esperanza, while she drank it—along with Bobo, who made sucking sounds—asked about José and the village all in a breath.

José was busy as a bee morning and night.

"We have lands now," said Pablo, proudly. "They run right by the side of the Big House, cross the wash up to the stony ground just before one gets to the Huitzo River. Enough for all. Next week is the drawing for plots. The engineers have been here. The new majordomo of the hacienda, Montesinos, is hopping mad about it all."

Not everything was smooth. There were two village factions. The older people mostly tried to stand in with the hacienda, not believing these startling changes would last. Two days before, there had been violence. Tiburcio, one of the hacienda party, had been shot from ambush.

Majordomo Montesinos openly accused José, head of the new Social Defense Corps, a group with rifles, of being responsible, and was trying to get outside intervention. The majordomo had already declared a boycott against all so-called disloyal villagers, refused to give them work, and had cut off the electric light service. The two village stores and the city hall had to use candles. The mill could not run.

Serious trouble was expected a month hence when the first elections were to be held. At present the village was run by a Delegate Mayor from the capital—who at least pretended to be impartial and in fact had appointed the temporary officials whom José demanded.

Going up the lane to Doña Gracia's store, Esperanza saw José coming toward her, rifle swung over his shoulder, pistol at his belt.

A few years ago he had been ducking out from a flogging. Now, a blazing bandanna was knotted under his round chin; his wide Stetson was drawn low down on his forehead; his puttees, encasing the pantaloons of his new khaki clothes, were highly polished. He walked with a slight swagger—but with wariness.

He hurried as soon as he saw her. Squinting at her from his one good eye, his mouth smiling, he took her into his arms. "Glad to be back?"

"Glad—glad!" she cried. "Things going well?"

His face set grimly. "Fine. But we're in for a fight, a tough one."

And so Milpa Verde had swung from slavery into a storm center. Soon Esperanza realized how tight and bitter the lines were growing. She became more and more alarmed for José.

The nose-pointed sheriff was busy filling people's ears full of fears. Everybody knew he was now on Montesinos' payroll, but many believed him. He warned that the hacienda would never give jobs again. If there were a drought or the villagers lost their lands and could raise no food, or if soldiers stole their crops and animals, they would simply starve.

Father Mateo also went around telling everyone who accepted lands "stolen" from the hacienda would be denied the sacraments.

How could such a genial, old priest, with his agate eyes and soft ways, be so bitter? Why should he oppose their recovering what was theirs?

"My dear," he told Esperanza, in his ripe, patient voice, "before the revolution we lived in peace without ugliness. Men had faith in Jesus. God took care of all who were worthy. Now many villagers carry guns. Men have been killed. Jesus said we should love our fellow-men. If the village takes what doesn't belong to it, still more violence will follow."

Esperanza protested.

"There was violence before—on one side. My brother was

brutally flogged and shipped off to the army. Was that just? Did Jesus wish that?"

Father Mateo patiently explained. "Your brother's quick tongue and rebellious nature got him into trouble. And now he is bringing more violence by his headstrong ways, not out of love for his neighbors, but because of vengeance in his heart for the hacendados. He must grow humble."

Once Esperanza would have accepted all this without quibble. But now she was indignant. She could not doubt Luis. She could not doubt her own brother. Why did Father Mateo always side with those who had abused and robbed the peasants? If he wanted peace and harmony, let there first be justice. Let the hacendados grow humble for a change.

Father Mateo put his pudgy smooth face close to hers—"We must all pray and trust in God"—and gathered up his skirts and shuffled out of the smoky door.

The first biennial drawing for the land was held. Esperanza received a fertile piece on the warm slopes toward the Huitzo; José, a strip near the village not far from San Benito; Pablo, one just back of the new city hall, near the Big House.

About thirty villagers, frightened by the priests and the threats of Montesinos and his agents, refused to accept their plots. It was decided to use the proceeds from them to build a school.

José rented a house just above San Benito, a pretty place with a nice pear orchard. It had even a better view of the volcanoes than Pablo's rear porch. Esperanza, who was to keep house, was delighted with it. Bobo would come with them.

He soon grew quieter, even had streaks when he helped around the house, even went to the fields and worked. The village communal spirit had infected him.

But no one could ever really be sure where he might be at night. He wandered alone through the fields like some untamed animal.

Hardly had the new owners of the land set about their plowing than a new calamity overtook the village, which seemed to verify the ominous warnings of the priest. The Llorona, the Crying One—whom some said was the ghost of Marina, the bed companion of Cortés—visited the village every night, striking terror into all hearts. Every night the wild shriek of the terrible ghost rang down the lava lanes, a blood-curdling wail.

Everybody shuddered and crossed himself. The Llorona's predilection, it was said, was stealing children.

Promptly at nightfall, mothers yanked their children indoors and made them lie still in the farthest corners. Some had even seen the terrible spirit—a runty, hooded figure all in white.

Several terrified villagers went to the authorities and gave up their lands. Even the authorities wavered whether to relinquish all the new lands. José's sternness saved the day.

The villagers now jammed into the chapel of San Benito, and the thin little Indian sacristan there had a busy time selling candles. Everybody rushed to Father Mateo to confess.

The village lived in terror. All feared worse calamities. The morale of the community was disintegrating. José went around in a black fury, determined to get his hands on said ghost.

Several days later, thirty cavalymen, off in the foothills chasing a rebel band, now on their way back to Amecameca, clattered through the village.

Everybody crowded around the colonel in charge to tell him about the terrible Llorona.

"Llorona, my foot!" he exclaimed, and cursed under his breath.

An alert dare-devil type, all cold will, fearing neither God nor man, without a superstition in his make-up, he smelt a mouse. That night he ordered his men to scatter carelessly through the village byways and bring in the Llorona, "dead or alive."

The soldiers' knees knocked together violently, their teeth chattered.

But presently the Llorona was dragged over to the town hall where the colonel was spending the night on a cot. Two Indian soldiers—still pale—yanked their kicking prisoner in through the door under the new carbide lights which had replaced the electricity cut off by the hacienda.

The colonel, just unlacing his boots, with one swipe yanked off the Llorona's white robes.

He swore loudly. A mouse-like man, with a stringy moustache, trembled before him abjectly, then dropped on his knees and embraced the colonel's shiny boots.

"Stand up, you bastard, and explain all this!" roared the colonel. "Who'n'ell are you?"

"I—I'm the sacristan of San Benito."

The colonel whistled. "Why have you been frightening the villagers?"

"Honest, it isn't my fault." The sacristan's nose quivered, and his tiny, black eyes glimmered moistly. "Father Mateo made me do it."

"The Padre Cura made you do it!" exclaimed the colonel. "How come?"

The sacristan whined. "The Padre said that since the revolution and the giving away of lands, which he opposes, no one comes to church any more. But since I began being Llorona, the church has been full every day."

The news sped through the village. A crowd soon collected in the town hall. Esperanza gathered her rebozo about her and followed them, Bobo at her heels.

The colonel was just making the sacristan give all the details. A gasp went up at the unbelievable disclosures.

Pleased at the amazement, the colonel, with a stern smile, sat down behind the judge's desk. He whispered in the ear of an aide, who went out quickly.

The crowd grew. Never had there been such excitement. They whispered and whispered while the colonel drummed his fingers and the sacristan trembled.

Suddenly Bobo darted over to the sacristan and yelled, "Whooooee," in the same tone as the Llorona.

The sacristan almost jumped out of his skin. Everybody roared with laughter.

"What the devil!" ejaculated the colonel. "Who are you?" he demanded.

Bobo smiled and cried: "I'm the smoke from the volcanoes!"

"Bah!" ejaculated the colonel, and drummed on the desk again.

The crowd grew uneasy. The sacristan was close to collapse.

Presently word ran through the throng that Father Mateo had been arrested.

In about ten minutes he was brought in. The soldiers themselves were in awe of him.

He entered in a stately fashion, holding his cross before him ostentatiously.

A few more pious villagers bowed; one started to kiss his hand.

"Get back!" snarled the colonel.

"I protest this sacrilegious—" began Father Mateo.

"Shut up!" snapped the colonel. "Sit down here." He indicated a chair.

For a moment longer, the colonel tapped the desk, then told the priest sharply that he wanted truthful answers.

"A man of God —"

"Shut up!" roared the colonel and told him what the sacristan had said.

Without blinking an eyelash, suavely Father Mateo gave the sacristan the lie. He had never ordered him out in this fashion. He himself was a holy man who merely looked after the spiritual welfare of his flock and had always tried to extirpate superstition.

Esperanza felt relieved. She wanted to have faith in Father Mateo. But the sacristan's face was gaping with horror.

The colonel turned to the sacristan more gently. "All we want to know is: who is responsible? If you did this on the priest's orders, nothing at all will happen to you; if you did it on your own, I'll string you up to the nearest tree."

The poor wretch snivelled. He looked first at the priest then at the colonel. On one depended his livelihood, on the other perhaps his life.

Father Mateo's face was pale and taut; his lips moved whether in prayer or curse, the poor sacristan did not know.

The colonel laid his revolver on the desk, took out a cigarette, tilted back in his chair and gazed at the ceiling. There was dead silence, the sacristan trembling, the priest's lips moving.

Suddenly the colonel brought his feet down with a bang, grabbed his gun, and exploded. "I'm not going to sit here all night."

The sacristan whimpered. "I swear—" Then he squared his shoulders and turned so as not to have to look at Father Mateo.

"I swear I was told to do this by the Padre Cura. He made me go out. What could I do?"

His plea was so earnest, few doubted him.

Father Mateo fingered his rosary and muttered a Bible verse about lying and eternal damnation, but his face was even more pallid.

The colonel toyed with his gun impatiently.

The sacristan, unable to stand the strain any longer, flew at Father Mateo with a shriek. "I haven't lied. And if lying means eternal damnation, it is you who are damned, you who are lost—I have been a sacristan of San Benito for ten years. Before Father Mateo came, I used to get the money from the sale of candles and other things. Now I have to give it all to him.

"He's a greedy man for all his gray hairs. He made me do this. My family has to eat. I obeyed."

A walnut-faced man, seamed and reddish about the eyes, like some strange nocturnal bird, was pushed forward.

"Here's the bell-ringer. Let him talk."

The newcomer's two occupations were ringing the church bells at the proper time and getting drunk. Drunk as he might be, he never failed punctually to climb up the narrow, broken, winding stairs of the tower. As bell ringing is a holy duty, God never let him fall and break his neck.

He stood there, flabby but shrunken, with the soft, ribald expression of the perpetual drunkard.

"Did you ever see the Llorona come out of the church?" asked the colonel.

"Last night, just as I was coming down from the tower. Was I scared stiff? I swore I'd never touch another drop."

His words were now so thick, the colonel said, "Yes, we can easily see you were frightened into entire sobriety."

Everybody roared. The bell-ringer grinned good-naturedly.

Father Mateo glowered at him.

"The Llorona," gabbled the bell-ringer, "went right up to the good father, who was pacing the garden path with the good book."

"Was the good father frightened?" asked the colonel.

"Nary a speck. He's a holy man and trusts wholly in God. But a poor sinner like me—I had to sit down on the stairs, my legs were just like two last year's cornstalks."

"Did he speak to the Llorona?"

The bell-ringer, catching a sharp glance from the priest, scratched his head perplexedly.

"Answer me!" thundered the colonel.

The bell-ringer looked sheepish. "Yes, good sir. He said something I didn't hear, and the Llorona, who wasn't wailing just then, said something back, and the good father nodded, and the Llorona went on, and I was sure glad to see the damned female go, I can tell you."

A titter ran over the crowd.

The colonel drummed his fingers thoughtfully then turned to the sacristan. "You are free. Nothing will happen to you."

The sacristan scurried out like a frightened mouse.

The colonel gave orders to a soldier. "Go get the father's horse. Bring it back saddled."

Turning to the crowd, he said: "Any one got a burro? He won't lose it. He'll make plenty."

José, who had come in near the end, nodded to Pablo, who at once stepped forward. "I have a burro, but —"

"Go bring it with some sort of a saddle on it."

Pablo went off, despite José, alarmed. When good animals got into the hands of soldiers that was always the end of them. He had managed to hide out his trim, white-footed little burro from all marauders who had ever come to Milpa Verde. To lose him now —

For a saddle, he put on only a broken contraption used for carrying loads. The wooden tree stuck up through the worn leather like a broken bone.

When he came back, leading the burro, Father Mateo's horse, a fine plump, if somewhat lazy animal, was standing there saddled. Blinking at the bright light, it reached out its neck to sniff at the dusty ground in the hope of finding something to munch at.

"This horse," decreed the colonel, "is entirely too good for a crooked priest. Would you like to trade your burro for it?"

Nonplussed, Pablo stammered. His eyes strayed to the animal's plump rump and the fine red and green hackamore, the carved saddle and neatly tooled bridle, the silver adornments.

Father Mateo told Pablo sharply that he was a wicked man who rarely came to church, who had accepted stolen lands. If he took the horse, he would not receive the sacraments, neither he nor his wife nor children.

Pablo was badly frightened, but the colonel, flying into a towering rage, yanked at the priest's robe. The buttons flew off, the cloth ripped.

Quivering with anger, the priest raised his cross against the defiler, his lips white with fury.

The colonel spoke curtly. "You're unfrocked. I've done what the Church ought to do to you. Now, you pot-bellied bastard, you're getting out of this village. If you ever come back, I'll string you up."

His men threw the priest belly-down across the burro and roped him fast. Helpless, he lay between the wooden thongs, his fat oozing out uncomfortably.

The colonel himself gave the burro a terrific wallop that sent

it pattering down the volcanic lane. Then he emptied his pistol into the air to give the priest a good scare.

XXXVIII

The Llorona myth had been exploded, but many villagers were now terribly frightened lest the throwing out of the priest bring dire evils.

Esperanza was in Doña Gracia's store.

"It was very wicked to drive out the priest," said a gloomy peasant. "Now we have no rain."

"We have no rain," was the sad echo.

"Since when did the priest bring rain?" demanded Esperanza.

Several shifted their sandals uneasily without looking at her.

Miche, a big Indian, spoke up in Aztec. "But San Lorenzo does. And how can little San Lorenzo be happy with Father Mateo gone?"

Pablo came in. "We went to bed with bread, we wake up with hunger," he contributed. "What good are our new lands if it doesn't rain?"

Miche turned on him accusingly. "And you have the priest's horse."

Pablo trembled. He wished he had his little burro back.

The rains did not come. The ground was parched. If the drouth continued, even with new lands, folk would, this coming winter, be close to starvation. This was clearly punishment for what had been done to Father Mateo. Talk ran to and fro, like flames over stubble fields.

Villagers who had a reputation for occultism, were queried at every moment. Pleased with their unaccustomed importance, their prognostications became more and more exaggerated.

People dropped in to talk with Bobo and found a thousand imaginary meanings in his strange utterances.

"Why is there no rain?" they asked him.

"The stone is angry," he replied.

His interlocutors went away shaking their heads, puzzled. Did Bobo mean the stone in the Big House, the god Huitzilopochtli?

Three villagers came back to him. "Do you mean Huitzilopochtli?"

"A pile of stones! A pile of stones!" He glared at them, twisting his hands.

Walking outdoors, he looked up at the sun, blinking and smil-

ing. He merely liked the sun, but the peasants saw mysterious significance.

"A pile of stones." On top of the mountain near the village was an old ruin, a few rough stone walls, hidden by bushes.

Treasure was supposed to be buried there, but guarded by a curse so that anyone who dared touch it would be struck dead. Some day the curse would be lifted. Undoubtedly Bobo meant this ancient pile. Villagers swarmed to talk to him. Some brought gifts, a red sash, a new sombrero.

"Where is Huitzilopochtli?" one asked.

Bobo had a malicious streak, perhaps because he so easily could frighten simple folk. He gave a shrieking "Whooeee," and threw up his right arm.

Everybody shrank back. That gesture, though, seemed to indicate the ruins. Beyond all doubt Huitzilopochtli was up there. They asked Bobo.

He shrieked: "He is there! He is there! And he is angry!"

Everybody trembled. Should they make a procession?

Bobo loved processions. "Oh, yes, a big procession."

Sandals ran up and down the lava lanes, hither and yon. The village bustled like an ant hill.

"Are you going to the procession?" —

"There is a procession to Huitzilopochtli at the old ruins —"

"Are you going? —"

They hurried in and out of Doña Gracia's store. They bought candles and ex-votos to hang on the trees.

"Are you going? —"

"Are you going? —"

They resurrected an old teponaztle drum—a hollowed carved tree trunk with languettes in the top, which had been used in the old days to honor the gods, and before dawn started swarming to the mountain top—a motley rag-tail procession, the dregs of centuries of oppression, celebrating a decayed memory of something once glorious.

Esperanza went along.

José, raging at all this "tom foolishness," was at first put out that she should go, then said he wanted to know everything that went on.

The crowd stumbled along in their leather sandals, or bare-foot, in their cheap cotton clothes, bright-colored sarapes, blue rebozos, big hats. Along the ravine they went, across the lava

plateau, along the Huitzo, now but a series of broken yellow pools.

Nearly everybody was there: Old Alvaro with his specs and black beard, Arnulfo with his Lolita, big with child, Petra and Guadalupe, Pablo with a live chicken under his arm—it might be wise to have something to sacrifice, and Bobo—uncrowned king of the procession.

Up and up the slot-like trail they toiled, the teponaztle drum booming, to see their ancient god, to propitiate him, to deflect his wrath, to bring rain to cracked dusty Milpa Verde.

Presently they came to a narrower trail, damp and cool. The stone cliff an arm's width on either side, leaned upon them seeming ready to clap together and imprison all these queer folk as in some fantastic Oriental fable. The pines stood in a ragged fringe, aloft on the bald cliff edges. Ferns sprang from the very rocks, patched with mangy moss. Aerial plants clung to stone and protecting bough. From the dank sod sprang livid fungi.

Ahead, the apex towered against the pale sky. Gradually, as they ascended, they looked down on the smoky mist rising slowly over the pockets of the valley. Gradually this rose in spirals and the valley lay in silver peace. Soon the sun was out strong, the trail dusty and hot.

Esperanza went with her arm about Bobo's shoulder.

Near the top, with a blood-curdling "Whooooee!", he broke away and rushed ahead.

Everyone stampeded excitedly after him.

They did not find Huitzilopochtli, though they beat their drums bravely. They slit the throat of Pablo's chicken and sprinkled blood on the pave, now cracked and weed grown.

Two days later, the rains began—terrific thunder showers, roaring down from the volcanoes, filling every gully with flood, gurgling everywhere through the land. The thirsty fields sucked up the water eagerly. Milpa Verde would have corn.

Black-bearded Alvaro jovially described the rain as Huitzilopochtli "laughing—laughing —"

Nicolás, a purblind old fellow, who had gone falteringly up the trail, declared he *had* seen the god. Huitzilopochtli had lifted his feathered serpent hands and had blessed them, and had told them they should buy a new jeweled robe for the Virgin, to replace the one stolen by the Zapatistas.

No one recalled all this. Esperanza chided him.

He sputtered back, calling her a silly, sightless child.

José turned it all to advantage by telling the more stupid that if Huitzilopochtli sent them rain, it was because he wanted them to use their new lands.

Election day came. Fireworks. New necromancy. The peons lounged happily around the church and town hall.

Old Alvaro was chief election official. All seemed going well.

But close to nightfall, Esperanza, passing near the grange, saw thirty armed men sweep down on the town hall.

They galloped in, shooting recklessly.

A few armed agrarians tried to defend the place.

For a few minutes there was a hot exchange of shots, then the agrarians took to their heels, three dead, six wounded.

One of the attackers stood cursing over one of the dead agrarians. Prying the lead out of a number of cartridges, he emptied the powder into the nostrils of the dead man and lit it. Everyone laughed ghoulishly.

Nauseated, Esperanza hurried on home. There she found a sentry at the door, and José and a dozen agrarians squatting around, rifles in hand. All were boiling with hate.

Eduardo was blubbering angrily—a cousin of his had been killed. He was for making a surprise counter-attack to recover the ballot-box.

José argued that they were outnumbered. They would be defeated. They should carry the matter to the governor.

José, Eduardo and three others decided to hurry off to the state capital.

The hacienda party seated its candidates in the town hall. The following morning federal cavalry clattered into town and deployed around the town hall. The villagers watched them sullenly.

About noon, the soldiers put the agrarian candidates for mayor, judge (black-bearded Alvaro), and secretary under arrest. Other arrests followed. The hacienda party had everything its own way. An ominous spirit settled down over the village.

So—thought Esperanza—things had not changed much; the fight had just begun.

She must get word to José of the arrests. Whom trust?—Ignacio —

He slipped out of town right after dark.

A week passed. No news.

The same ominous tenseness continued to grip the village—like the still, hopeless days in a year of drought.

XXXIX

Ten days later the commission returned.

With an ugly oath, José hurled his sombrero into a corner. "They beat us!"

Esperanza, alarmed, sat down on a low stool.

"The majordomo," continued José, "has the governor in his pocket. The hacienda party will remain in control of the village."

"Ignacio got there?"

"Yes, and a wise head you have. We did get the promise that everyone arrested would be freed. We can keep our lands, but we'll get no help with tools or seed or any credit. The governor, though, will help us build a school—that's something."

Little by little the village lapsed back into its routine ways. The soldiers withdrew. The new hacienda officials—the bantani sheriff was now town-secretary—took up their tasks. Outwardly there was peace, but at bottom the division was as deep as ever.

The villagers ignored the officials as much as possible and never invited them to any fiestas.

The hacienda still boycotted everyone except those in its own party.

But life, because of the land, in spite of all, promised to be ampler. Hope was strong.

The new mayor, Tadeo Andrade, a short rolly-polly mestizo with a likable, fat-faced leer—dressed not in Indian style, but in striped trousers, bright silk shirt, and a rolling Stetson hat—was scarcely a villager at all, but a well-to-do share-cropper and typical good-natured, tricky, rural politician.

One of his first acts was to bring Father Mateo back.

Pablo was at once dragged over to the town hall for stealing the priest's horse. He had to give up the plump beast.

When he demanded his burro, he was threatened with jail and fine.

But Esperanza and others testified so insistently as to how the colonel had forced the exchange of animals, that Father Mateo, seeing which way the wind was blowing, suddenly posed as Pablo's benefactor, and refused to sanction any punishment.

Pablo went off, thinking to himself that one should always live

by one's maxims. He had known that any animal brought to a soldier was lost—so it had turned out.

Esperanza was furious.

Pablo merely shrugged, pulling his mouth down drolly. "Two birds in the bush; none in the hand. Today mine, tomorrow yours."

This was typical of the petty affronts imposed on members of the agrarian party.

Terrible news came through. Zapata had been tricked into ambush in the most treacherous manner by General Pablo González and shot.

It was a great blow to José. "He and Felipe Carrillo in Yucatán have been the only honest leaders," he mourned, "and now they've killed Zapata. Well, I left his forces. I can't say anything. I thought we could do something here, that the time for revolt had ended. Now, I'm not so sure." He blinked his one good eye.

"The school—" Esperanza reminded him.

"We'll try a bit longer."

José pushed the school. The governor had promised a thousand pesos toward it if the village raised a thousand more—a goodly sum. With a wry face, José took the matter up with Andrade.

The mayor, pleased that José wanted to coöperate, agreed to support the project. The money, he convinced José, should all be handled by the town authorities.

José set to work to raise the funds. A hard task. Everyone was poor after the disturbances. But Majordomo Montesinos actually contributed a hundred pesos, the mayor twenty-five, Toño—back on the hacienda—twenty-five. Each peasant was asked for five pesos. Some had to give it in labor, in addition to the week's free work all had agreed to donate. With José's enthusiasm and a bit of official pressure, the entire sum was raised in less than three months. The adobes and materials were ordered.

But on one pretext or another, building operations were delayed from week to week.

One bright morning, shortly after dawn, Esperanza heard the church bell ringing in the manner customary to call the villagers together for some special event or for communal work.

So the school was being started! A great day for Milpa Verde. Esperanza was glad, if for nothing more, for José's sake.

She hurried out to watch.

To her surprise the materials were carted away from the school site to the church patio.

A few villagers at once quit work.

"What does this mean?" she asked Eduardo.

With a dour look, he replied, "They say a new curatage is to be put up for Father Mateo."

Although already he lived with a customary "niece" in the best house in the whole village, many villagers said that whatever the good father wanted was his due. Esperanza was heart-sick.

To explain this queer switching of plans, the mayor said the money from the governor had not arrived, that for the present they could not go ahead with the school. In the meantime the materials would be "loaned" to the Church.

José, furious, hurried a new commission off to the governor.

Evasive, the latter refused to say whether he had sent the money or not.

Meanwhile the new curatage went up with voluntary labor and the materials purchased for the school. Materials also mysteriously traveled over to the home of the mayor himself. Presently he began building a nice addition to his own house.

Some of the villagers lost faith in José. At any cost, he decided, the village must be given a school.

Ignacio, who had a big, two-room stone house, agreed to move out of one room and clean the other up for the school children. Other villagers offered to go up to the mountains and cut down timbers to make benches and desks. The difficult question was a teacher.

"I have it!" exclaimed Ignacio. "My cousin, Marciano Dominguez, can read and write. Though he left here six years ago, he's from the village and would like to come back. He's working in a grocery store in Mexico City, but if guaranteed a plot of ground, he'd come to teach. I'll provide him a place to sleep and meals, so he wouldn't need much salary."

As the children were of widely varying ages, Esperanza volunteered to take charge of part of the school-room during the exercises of the other half and during recesses.

They found fifteen families able to put up a peso a month. A letter was sent off to Marciano.

A favorable reply came back.

Enthusiastically the villagers prepared benches and desks, hewing them out by hand with their machetes. The walls of the

school-room were white-washed. A strip of black-board cloth, copy-books and pencils were secured from Mexico City. They got free text-books from the Department of Education.

The more religious folk thought the priest should be asked to bless the new school at the opening and that he should come every day to give religious instruction.

José and Ignacio fought this. Father Mateo had gotten the materials to have been used for a really beautiful school. Besides he wanted at least thirty pesos a month for his brief religious instruction, more than Marciano, who would work a whole day. Only the official subjects, it was finally decided, would be taught.

The school was ready to open the following Monday. A real fiesta was planned. Father Mateo, also the town officials, despite ill feeling, were invited.

But the priest now discovered that the new Department of Education readers were different from those used in church schools. The traditional way to teach letters was by the catechism. The new text used secular material, nice pictures of children, animals, and flowers. Blasphemous! He denounced the texts. He thundered that they could not be used.

José muttered to Esperanza that Father Mateo might again go riding out of town tied to an ass.

Esperanza, heart and soul with the school, was surprised to find that now she sided wholly with José. The priest's trickery with the Llorona, his robbery of the school building materials, his denouncing of these honest efforts made with such great sacrifice on the part of the villagers—had aroused contempt for him in her.

The inaugural fiesta was held. Floral arches were put up over the main lanes and before Ignacio's house. Rockets were shot off. The band played lively tunes with usual Indian dissonance. And soda-pop—there would be no drinking—was provided for all. For once the village turned out in great style for an evening not having to do with the Church or pagan superstitions.

The hacienda officials did not appear. Father Mateo refused to bless the cross for the new school. But the villagers carried it into the church and out again and put it over the wall behind the teacher's desk, along with the pictures of Hidalgo, Morelos and Juárez, Mexico's outstanding leaders, all in their day excommunicated by the Church.

Father Mateo was further infuriated. From then on his rich, fruity voice grew harsh. Jealous that his rôle as sole spiritual

mentor of the village was jeopardized, he frightened many parents into taking their children out of school.

José tried to get the compulsory school law enforced, but the mayor said it applied only to government schools. Despite threats of eternal damnation and official hostility, faithful villagers kept the school going.

Esperanza went to school, did her promised part, and took an even greater interest in reading and studying. Every time she went to Amecameca, she got some new paper-back book to read. She copied out whole chapters in a painfully slow hand. Some day, perhaps, she could perfect herself to be a teacher.

She and Marciano—a blondish young man with a firm face, big smiling mouth and straight, bony forehead—got along famously. Marciano, in fact, was liked by everybody, and the children adored him.

Going to school also brought Esperanza in frequent contact with Ignacio. He found many pretexts to be around when she came in and out. They had long, pleasant conversations. He had the easy banter that passes for humor among simple people.

Limited though his experience and knowledge of many things compared to her own, Esperanza liked his powerful body, his strong hands, and sureness of muscles and mind, and his honesty.

He was very direct in his love-making. One day he pointed to his mat in the corner. "It would be warmer with two?" Or he would say, "You're a bright woman; between us, we'd get ahead fast."

One beautiful, balmy autumn night, he came upon her in the lane. There was harvest odor in the air. The corn was in the silos. The yellow calabashes had been cut and lined roof and wall.

He looked into her shadowy eyes. She saw the soft, burning brightness in his.

Walking along in the dark with him gave her a sense of assurance. His mere presence fulfilled—almost—everything she needed.

Near San Benito, close to her home, he stepped aside to let a burro pass.

Suddenly she felt his strong arms about her, his breath hot on her cheeks.

She rested there. It was good to feel a man's arms. Almost, almost, she was tempted by him.

Who after all was more attractive in the village than Ignacio? Why should she not really sink back into the village pattern?

Somehow she was not, could not be, merely a villager. Beyond a certain point he could never satisfy her.

She pulled away, laughing softly, and patted him on the cheek.

Her gesture infuriated him. Sullenly he turned on his heel without a word and left her.

She felt badly.

For many days he avoided her at school.

She felt worse.

XL

Esperanza continued to keep house for José and came to know him better and love him more deeply. For her he had taken up the torch where Luis had dropped it.

He adored her and found her advice valuable. He lived the life of the others, early to the fields, home late. Politics were quiet.

She wondered whether he would ever marry. His former sweetheart, Carlota, had long since left for parts unknown. The only woman who now interested him was Adelita Velásquez, a tall, neat, competent girl. Esperanza scarcely knew her but judged she had quite a will of her own.

Esperanza almost made up her mind to marry Ignacio. But some inner restlessness and doubt held her back.

Instead, she kept on with her routine, went to the school, cleaned the house, ground corn, got meals, wove fajas. Week ends she went to Amecameca to sell, during schools vacations traveled clear to Mexico City.

In Mexico City she stayed cheaply with a Milpa Verde family near the American cemetery, the difference in price for her wares more than compensated her for the cost of her trip. She made arrangements with the Moreland Curio Shop to send in goods. She was happy enough.

The curatage was long since up, a sturdy, tile-roofed building where Father Mateo could live in comfort with his new "niece," a lynx-eyed, snub-nosed girl, always piously twisting her rebozo, who talked with a nervous, wheezing laugh.

Father Mateo had a good phonograph and often invited villagers up to listen in. José would never go, but despite her ill-feeling, Esperanza went several times.

Through a door could be seen the priest's ample bedchamber, his huge bed of medieval grandeur, with lace curtains, pink lace

covering, heaped high with soft, lace pillows. His service was of silver. He had a number of bronze and porcelain statues of saints, a big picture of Jesus of the Sacred Heart, and framed religious mottoes. Undoubtedly he was very holy. His material refinements convinced the villagers, though they paid for them, that they were fortunate to have such a superior man to guide them.

Occasionally Father Mateo tried to persuade Esperanza to give up the school. She hinted that the curatage would make a fine school. After that he never invited her again.

And so two years rolled by. The time for new elections was approaching. One bright day Esperanza watched the clouds climb up from the blue south wall of the valley. The wind broke off pieces of them which rode toward the mountain crests, until the sky was full of long ranks—like an attacking army. The wind increased. The clouds dashed in full charge—sulphurous banners unfurled—and finally smothered the volcanoes entirely. The temperature dropped.

"It will snow up there," Esperanza said to herself, shivering. She moved indoors to weave and get her blood in circulation.

Not only did it snow on the volcanoes, it snowed in Milpa Verde—a rare event that happened only every five years or so—a whirl of wet flakes, drifting down over cactus and stone walls. The burros shook their heads, surprised. Alarmed chickens huddled miserably.

The villagers ran along the lanes, shivering in their white cotton clothes, their sandals or bare feet, but laughing gleefully, frolicking, shoving snow down each other's backs.

Petra came up, her thin rebozo so thick with snow she looked like a white-haired old woman:

"'Twill be cold sleeping tonight," she observed, "and you without a man to warm you."

"But no one to beat me either," she retorted.

Petra merely laughed contentedly. "One is doubly warm after being beaten."

The house filled up with white-clad peasants—each with the naked blade of his machete crooked in his arm—to decide who should be the candidates for the next elections. They shook the snow off and passed a tequila bottle from hand to hand.

Esperanza, bustling at her tasks, caught fragments of conversation.

"Worms in the crop . . . the snow . . . Yes, a man gets out

of sight fast at a gallop, but he who trots has gone a long ways by sunrise"—Pablo's voice at the last. And a little later: "They took my burro, they took my horse."

José called them to order. They were to select good men, honest men, men not afraid to stand up for the rights of the village. The present mayor had robbed them.

"Bandit! Death to him!" growled the little gathering.

If these humble men, smelling of the cornfields and the volcanic earth, were illiterate, they were dreadfully sincere. Rarely shifting their positions, they grasped their straw hats tensely with gnarled hands. They merely loved their village and the new freedom. They did not, in the least, realize that in gatherings such as this all over the land was being born a new Mexico. They chose Ignacio as candidate for mayor.

Mayor Andrade, when he heard of the new agrarian candidates, merely laughed. Sure of hacienda support, he had no fear of failure.

But soon tension grew. Armed hacienda guards came to Ignacio's house to look for him.

Fortunately he was out, but they smashed up the school, broke all the benches, tore up the text-books.

Marciano and Esperanza were furious and heart-broken.

Two days later, crossing a field, Esperanza saw a dead man in a maguey plant, his head rammed into the sap—one of the hacienda party.

That evening, a beautiful, moonlit night, she and José were coming down a lane when out of the dark of the San Benito churchyard, whizzed a bullet.

With an oath, José flung Esperanza into a ditch, and though he did not have a gun, leaped over the wall to try to get a glimpse of his assailant.

Hearing footsteps, he dashed around the church, knife in hand.

Esperanza jumped up and called to him to be careful. Terrified, she ran after him.

Turning the corner toward a vague blue wall, she saw a peasant with a gun, clambering the rear churchyard enclosure.

José dashed forward.

The man pulled himself up on his belly lizard-wise to get his balance, then lifted his gun.

Esperanza screamed.

José spun the knife blade in his hand. Aiming carefully, he sent it flying, with an overhead swish of his arm.

The man fired.

José flattened himself against the church.

The man on the wall made a motion to drop on the other side.

The knife, slender, glistening in the moonlight, hung curving in the air for an eternity —

It seemed, at last, to turn over leisurely. The point whirled forward, dropped, plunged.

The blade struck the man in the ribs—deep.

His hands went up. His pistol pirouetted into the air and clattered on the stones.

He went limp with a gasp and wheeze and plunged head down into the churchyard.

José ran forward, Esperanza at his heels.

"It's Uriante!" cried José. "One of that damned hacienda bunch!"

Esperanza, heart pounding, looked down at the crumpled figure, head gashed wide open, bleeding profusely.

"But, José, you won't have a chance if they know who did it."

His teeth clicked. "Not one. I'll have to take to the hills."

Calmly he leaned down and drew out his knife and wiped it carefully on the man's white trouser leg.

"He's dead as last year's cornstalk. Come!"

He and Esperanza slipped out of the churchyard.

The lane was clear.

"Go across through the gap in the fence," whispered José. "Turn right past Darien's place, near the wall, under the willows, down to the ravine."

They slipped through the gap just as white figures appeared at a far bend.

Darien's hut was dark, but a dog raced after them, barking. A figure stood up in the doorway to stare at them.

But it was too dark under the willows for them to be identified. They clambered down the empty ravine and finally reached home by a round-about route.

Bobo rushed in. "Whooooee! A dead man. They've found a dead man!"

José cursed under his breath.

The new death threw the village into consternation. Even the agrarians themselves were puzzled.

Ignacio did not dare go anywhere now without armed protectors. Half a dozen villagers took turns guarding his house. The other agrarian candidates no longer slept at home, but around with friendly neighbors.

José constantly counselled moderation. Violence would merely bring in federal troops. But he and his friends were determined not to let the hacienda party steal the election this time.

On election day all agrarians having arms were assembled at the houses nearest the polling place—ready. The rest scouted around. They were to give the alarm at the first approach of armed men.

Loyal village women were also out scouting. José gave Esperanza a pistol and told her to go up the ravine to wash clothes. If she sighted anything she was to shoot into the air.

XLI

Esperanza chose a deep, dark pool where she could sit on the stones in the sun, for the day was chilly.

The ravine was still. A slight breeze ruffled the leaves, but the quiet hush grew on her, grew and swelled to something ominous.

Once a small animal darted in the brush. Another time a stone fell. She started violently both times. Something, something terrible, she felt, was going to happen.

Toward sundown, a group of horsemen turned the bend above. All were armed.

She yanked out the pistol and fired all six shots into the air. Grabbing up her basket of clothes, she started up the steep bank.

The troop, startled into action, swept down the ravine, hoofs clattering on the stones.

They began firing. Bullets whistled all around her. They rang on the rocks. Little puffs of dirt jumped up.

She reached for a branch to swing herself to safety. A sharp pain jabbed through her arm.

She missed the branch, lost her balance, and rolled down the side of the ravine.

Her basket of clothes jumped from rock to rock, spilling out.

As she fell, she caught a glimpse of Majordomo Montesinos leaning forward in his saddle, his weight on his toes, his hands braced on the horn, watching her tumble.

Trees floated up and out, as if their roots were in the air, a

surf of green, blurred mountain figures, staring faces, a swirl of dust and stones, and she plumped like a stone, landing hard.

In a second the men stood over her, pistols in hand.

If it had not been for Montesinos, they might have killed her.

"Leave her alone," he commanded, sharply. "Get going."

They galloped on down the ravine and left her bleeding there on a jutting of rock.

She raised on her elbow, heart pounding, hoping José had heard the shots.

The hacienda guards whirled up the steep slope of the ravine, their horses digging their front hoofs in and leaping like jack-rabbits. One bluish roan, crowded from its narrow footing, made a spiral twist, landed with a snort in steep detritus, and kept on going to keep from falling. It zig-zagged, feet quick and sure on the loose gravel, like a dextrous dancer, then whirled and went at the steep bank again—a beautiful performance.

The whole gang disappeared over the bank. Hoof beats rang on the lava on their way toward the town hall.

Esperanza sank back, stunned from her wound and her fall. In a daze, she heard insects buzzing around her. Then she heard distant shots, a fusillade.

She sat up frightened, listening.

The shots died away.

Now she was worried about José and Pablo.

She rubbed a bruised place on her hip and looked around for her basket.

Majordomo Montesinos rode back up the ravine. Approaching Esperanza, he swung off his horse.

He was a tall man in a gray flannel shirt, black tie, cloth riding breeches, English boots. Not brutal like Rufo, he actually looked kindly, with twinkling brown eyes, pouting mouth, plump cheeks and round, soft chin. But he had a lean body, and his ears stuck out stiff and large, as though pasted on.

"Are you hurt?" he asked solicitously. "That was stupid of my men."

"And the whole thing is stupid of you," she answered shortly.

The days when she had to be meek to his kind had long passed.

He restrained his irritation. "Your arm is bleeding. Can I help you?"

She looked at her arm dazedly. For a second, seeing the blood staining her sleeve and running down her hand, she was faint.

"My own people will tend to my arm," she said stiffly.

He smiled again. "As you wish. I had no desire to injure a woman."

For a moment she was a bit disarmed, but his soft ways were not going to win her.

"Why don't you leave us alone? Before you can ever get our lands back, you will have to wipe out Milpa Verde. Keep on this way and your own life won't be safe."

"Who are you?" he demanded, sharply.

"Esperanza Huitrón," she said proudly.

His soft face hardened. "Ah, you are the sister of that trouble-maker, José Huitrón." He gave a snarling little laugh. The man had teeth somewhere in that soft casing.

She would not give an inch. "My brother is not making trouble. He is merely fighting for our rights. You people are making all the trouble. You came in and smashed up our school. But you can't keep the village under your thumb any more. It can't be done."

"We won't discuss that," he replied severely. "Better let me have a look at your arm. Say, you are a pretty thing. I heard as much."

He had, she thought bitterly, probably heard of her and Joaquín. Angrily, she started to clamber back up the hill.

"Wait," he called. "You ask for peace. Then let us begin between us two here. Let me bandage your arm."

She heard a sliding noise.

Bobo's awkward figure, leaping from rock to rock, came down with a long slide of gravel beside her.

"You are hurt, Esperanza!"

He shot a baleful look at the majordomo.

Montesinos repeated his offer to Esperanza.

She replied curtly. "No, thank you. I want nothing to do with you till you call off your armed thugs."

Bobo gathered up her scattered washing.

Holding her throbbing arm, she and the dwarf climbed up the bank.

At the summit, she looked around.

Montesinos was still standing at the same place. On his face was undisguised admiration.

Bobo picked up a big stone. Before Esperanza could stop him, he hurled it at Montesinos.

It struck him on the shoulder. He jerked with pain, and his look of admiration turned to the fury of a man grossly insulted.

XLII

At the sounds of shots from the ravine, the armed villagers in houses near the city hall ran to join forces where the lane debouched beyond the hut where Esperanza formerly lived.

At this exact moment, José and five others were casting their ballots.

All five leaped at the mayor's guards.

With one blow José sent their leader crashing backwards and wrenched his rifle from his grasp.

Pablo swiped at one with a club—"that for my burro, you goat —"

The man's skull cracked.

The rest of José's companions were equally lucky.

The captured guns were stacked in a corner, and all the guards were run off except the mayor and the one Pablo laid up. These were trussed up.

The armed villagers dashed up and José deployed them quickly for defense.

The hacienda troops spouted from the ravine.

They wheeled around and around, re-forming on the bank, then galloped across the open fields.

When the attackers were within a hundred yards, the agrarians opened fire.

The hacienda party, which had expected the mayor's guards to hold off the villagers from the city hall, were filled with consternation.

Several reeled and tumbled from their saddles. One man, wounded or dead, fell; but his foot had caught in the stirrup and his horse, maddened with fright, dashed on pitching and kicking at its macabre burden.

Several drew short rein, slid their horses in the dust and wheeled back. The rest swerved to the right, firing as they swept by the town hall.

One villager, slightly wounded, stayed at his post and, converted into a cursing fury, swore he would kill the man who shot him.

The attackers galloped on beyond the chapel, wheeled clear around it, and dismounted behind an adobe wall.

A desultory firing kept up.

The peasants were jubilant at their first success.

Growled one, sighting carefully, "There's the bastard, Bolaños, who wouldn't keep his damned pigs out of my corn."

He pulled the trigger. "Ha!" he yelled with glee. "Got him."
"Come on, you yellow scabs! —"

"Watch me get that hooked-nose Jew! —"

Hot words, curses, bitter, half-jovial, accompanied the firing—quick emotions always make the Mexican vocal.

The enemy ceased firing and sneaked back around the chapel. Getting their horses and keeping out of range, they galloped off.

The villagers danced with jubilation. They had won.

Esperanza's arm, though it had bled a good deal, was merely deeply scratched. Petra, her square face passionate with solicitude, bathed the wound, applied herbs to draw out any infection, and bound it up. In ten days it was practically well.

The agrarians remained under arms day and night. The customary commissions scurried off to the new governor.

He supported the agrarians.

Mayor Andrade, so utterly confident of reelection, now realizing he was really beaten, jumped on his horse and headed for the railroad.

Esperanza, passing by San Benito, met a crowd of excited villagers.

"The mayor threw himself under the northbound train!"

About half an hour out, she met some of the hacienda party—who glowered at her—carrying a load in a mat.

Coming closer, she saw that the mat was soaked with blood. On it lay the mayor, his head crushed, one shoulder all pulp, an arm cut off.

Village funds were found short nearly six hundred pesos, and the thousand pesos from the former governor had mostly been stolen. In addition there was the misuse of the school building funds.

Representations were made to Father Mateo to recover the cost of the building materials.

Declaring furiously that the materials were a contribution of the faithful, apoplectically he ordered the emissaries out of the curatage as godless children.

A conference was held in José's house. The peasants—it was a rainy afternoon—came in wet shirts sculptured to strong torsos,

their white trousers sopped and rolled above their knees, straw sombreros soggy.

Some were for taking drastic action against the priest. But it was finally decided to leave Father Mateo alone and go ahead putting up a new school.

The work was pushed rapidly. Meanwhile, classes were resumed in Ignacio's house.

Up in Querétaro, Mexico had adopted a new constitution. Esperanza, culling over the document, discovered that all churches were declared national monuments, property of the government.

This law solved a serious problem for the new school, almost completed. As level land was at a premium, for playgrounds and school gardens, they would be obliged to bring earth to cover slabs of stone. But on one side of the San Benito atrium was a large flat quadrangle, toward the back of which stood the new curatage. Esperanza suggested they use part of this level ground.

The villagers squinted at the constitution again, and as Father Mateo was temporarily in Mexico City, though a few were horrified, they decided to follow her suggestion.

They put up basket-ball posts, built pens for chickens and rabbits, and staked off a school garden with a light, bamboo fence.

The school was inaugurated with a big fiesta. The governor sent down his secretary, young Samuel Gris, to represent him. People arrived from all over, even the big band from Amecameca, headed by the mayor himself, none other than the pompous judge.

Bobo promptly annexed the band, and its members gleefully made him march at the head.

There were flowers, arches, dancing, music, speech-making. Young Marciano, the teacher, and Esperanza were in their glory. The village was in its glory. Its first public school!

Marciano and Esperanza had worked hard with the children for nearly a month to drill them in physical culture exercises—just as was done in Mexico City. A hilarious basket-ball game was played according to original rules. The gnarled peasants sat around watching their children with pride, a glow of pleasure on their long dulled countenances.

In the new schoolhouse, a neat two-room adobe building with a beautiful tiled roof, newly-made benches, desks, and blackboards nicely framed, they held a party and celebrated all night. Folk dances. School children recited stiffly. The band played tirelessly.

During the intermissions, one of the players would let Bobo practice on his trombone. The dwarf, delighted, caught on quickly. This gave Esperanza an idea.

Father Mateo returned a week later. Rabid about the use of a corner of the church grounds for school purposes, every Sunday he fulminated against the godless school, founded upon thievery and immorality.

Naturally the hacienda party sided with him. Even some fearing souls among the agrarians took their children out in alarm. The authorities promptly enforced the compulsory education law.

Father Mateo, having successfully driven the villagers away when they protested his theft of building materials, felt overconfident. There was no godless colonel around now. The villagers, poor, ignorant, timid, had always bowed to the priest.

One Sunday, carried away by his own eloquence, his mellow voice rolling out in still more violent accusations against the school, he demanded the destruction of the athletic field and gardens. Girding up his robe with pudgy hand, he set out at the head of part of his flock.

Some ran to tell José and the authorities.

Esperanza, who had gone to Mass, was horrified. Determined to protect the gardens and the animals, so beloved by the children, she dashed on ahead.

All the previous week she had been working with the pupils. The trampled ground had been hard, but the children had toiled happily, breaking up the clods, harrowing the soil, fertilizing it, sprinkling it.

Placing herself in front of the bamboo fence, Esperanza raised her arms and pleaded with her neighbors.

But the priest lifted his holy cross and cursed her.

The mob rushed ahead and tossed her aside in a heap over against one wall.

A hand helped her to rise. It was little Bobo.

"People like to injure themselves. They like to destroy what is good for them. No sense—" he mumbled.

The mob broke down the basket-ball posts; they tore down the animal pens; they wrecked the bamboo fence and trampled down the seeded plots.

Some were for tearing Esperanza limb from limb: Rocks

whizzed in her direction. Several hit her and Bobo, though she tried to protect him.

Father Mateo called them off. With piously raised cross, the good father led his flock back into the church and prayed, eyes streaming tears, over the holy deed just done.

José, the town officials, and the Social Defense Corps, talked the matter over. José wanted the priest arrested for inciting to riot and destroying town property. But some, secretly fearing for their immortal souls, were afraid.

It was decided to go in a body, along with Esperanza, Marciano and Ignacio, to lay down an ultimatum to the priest.

Father Mateo received them more than unctuously.

But no one kissed his hand. The peasants held on to their straw hats embarrassedly, shuffling their sandals, eyes cast down. Except for the leaders, nearly all, awed by the priest, were painfully torn—pull devil, pull baker; new justice versus hoary prejudice; desire for the welfare of their children versus fears of eternal damnation.

Father Mateo, noticing their shuffling embarrassment, took heart.

But José, Esperanza, Marciano, Ignacio and the other leaders, not at all awed, burning up with resentment, were hard and hostile.

José spoke up boldly. "Father, we have come to tell you two things —"

"Remember, my son, you are in the House of God."

"This curatage is not the House of God. God does not steal from his people or destroy their goods."

Father Mateo rose agitatedly, his face livid. He clutched his cross. "Get you gone."

Some of the Indians shuffled back, frightened.

But José, legs planted apart, stood his ground.

"I'm the constable of this village." He clenched his fist to control himself. "We have done you the courtesy of coming here instead of arresting you."

The priest's neck muscles swelled, but instead of bursting into a tirade, he moved his bloodless lips in prayer and bowed his head in humility.

"I am merely the servant of God for my flock."

José recited the grievances of the villagers. Henceforth Father Mateo was not to attack the school in public or private. If he

did, the authorities would padlock his church and run him out as the colonel did.

"We are going to repair the damage you have done at our own expense and toil. But if anything further happens, you know what will be done to you and to your church."

Father Mateo was beaten. His face drawn, he replied in his rich voice: "I have merely tried to see that you teach religion in the school. May in time the true words and deeds of God be instilled in your hearts."

José cut him short and again warned him.

XLIII

More and more, Esperanza went down to Mexico City to sell. Nearly always now, Guadalupe, who was also weaving, went with her.

Esperanza would immediately make the rounds of various customers, among them many foreigners to whom Caldwell had sent her. Guadalupe would stay in the market to sell.

As soon as Esperanza had heard Caldwell was back, she had gone to see him. He wasn't in, but she met his wife.

Her ash-blonde hair and plain, unanimated face made her look like a pressed flower in an herbarium. Esperanza recalled the rumor that Caldwell had married her only for her money. But though a tired spirit, Mrs. Caldwell was kind and gracious.

Ida, their daughter, a trifle older than Rosa, ten perhaps, was a spoiled adult-acting child, with thick glasses and pasty blonde complexion.

On a second visit—for Mrs. Caldwell had liked and bought some of her things—Esperanza saw Caldwell himself, portlier and sterner, if somewhat deaconish. She learned that he was now manager of an American bank.

"You are a very discreet person," he said, smiling, for Esperanza had said nothing to his wife about Marta, little Winifred or anything.

On her way back to the market, in the Alamenda, Esperanza ran into Marta.

Marta, looking harrassed and thin, was dressed in black—her father had died. They had lost everything. She was working. Caldwell had been nice enough to make a place for her in the bank, and she was studying typing and shorthand.

Marta made Esperanza sit down on a bench. "I envy your

world." She clasped her hands and looked at Esperanza intently. "You can do anything you want. Do you realize how few women of my comfortable class can? How I should like to be free and not have to think of what my mother or others might say!"

"It is Caldwell, of course."

"Yes." Marta stared across the park. "Quite a few people unjustly believe the worst about me. Still, I wouldn't mind if—" She bit her tongue. "He doesn't love his wife, never will, but he won't divorce her on account of the child. Well —"

She stood up abruptly. "I'm silly, but I had to talk. Good-bye, dear Esperanza." She hurried off, tears in her eyes.

After her usual rounds, Esperanza always returned to the market to stay with Guadalupe till closing time at one-thirty. Then they packed up their goods and went out to the little adobe house of the Milpa Verde family near the American cemetery.

In the afternoon, they sewed, or Esperanza visited other addresses or took her stand near Sanborn's restaurant or the Hotel Regis, where most foreigners passed by.

Usually the two girls went to bed soon after dark, though now and then they went to a cheap movie, where for ten centavos they could see blood-and-thunder pictures, or else to a street theatre where, for the same price, they heard songs and saw burlesque or puppets.

At times Esperanza worried about Guadalupe. Though usually light-hearted, her cousin had too frequent spells of black moodiness.

Having lost her slimness, if not so good-looking, Guadalupe, with her small dancing black eyes and happy, though satirical little mouth, preserved a dashing liveliness. But now too often she relapsed into these sullen silences. Prolonged virginity had given her a strained, nervous expression, accentuated by that satirical droop of lips. Though eager to marry, having conserved herself thus far, and having seen men in Mexico City, she looked down on village males, her head full of romantic notions about flashy mestizo types. Esperanza did not fully realize this.

One afternoon she came home late—tired, ill-humored from not having sold anything. Guadalupe, who had said she was going to sew, was not home.

Then Esperanza noticed her belongings were missing. Fear gripped her.

Pinned to a bundle was a scrap of paper on which was scrawled "Good-bye" and a few lines.

Guadalupe had met the man she loved. They were going to get married. She would let Esperanza know about it later —

Why should Guadalupe run off in this clandestine fashion? This boded no good. Esperanza was frantic.

That night, desperate and lonely, she slept only in snatches and got up heavy-eyed and tired.

She simply had to find Guadalupe. But where? How?

She remembered a tall fellow in a gray slouch hat who had frequented their market stall. Guadalupe had always been very flustered when he was around.

Esperanza hurried up to the market. Several fellow venders had noticed the man; several had seen him talking to Guadalupe. One woman, who sold reed-bottom chairs, thought he was a carpenter working on a nearby building.

About noon Esperanza went over to the building and waited for the workmen to come out. The man was not among them.

There was nothing else she could do.

She hated to go back to Milpa Verde without Guadalupe. How face Petra? And suppose Guadalupe should need her? Her cousin had no one else in Mexico City to whom she could turn.

One evening, after twilight, Esperanza, going home sadly with a bundle, cut down a side street. A post in the narrow dirt sidewalk caused her to stop for another pedestrian to pass. She glanced into a parked auto. She gasped. Caldwell and Marta, wrapped in each other's arms, kissing passionately.

Esperanza, embarrassed, not at all shocked, for some reason felt disgusted. What childishness! Perhaps this would now mean Caldwell and Marta, instead of Caldwell and Pepita. Poor Mrs. Caldwell!

After Esperanza got home, she pictured the two of them, Marta and Caldwell, kissing so passionately. She suddenly thought of Luis. Where was Lorenzo now? She recalled too, that warm night in the lane when Ignacio's arms had folded about her, and she had felt the comfort of male embrace.

She was alone now. She had been alone for years. Young enough, good-looking enough, but alone. She did not want to waste more of her life. She hoped Guadalupe was happy.

The days passed. One night, late, as she pushed open the door, she heard sobbing. On the floor was a crumpled figure.

Esperanza jumped over, dropped on her knees, put her arms about her. "Guadalupe, my darling."

Guadalupe tried to shake her off. "Don't touch me. I'm not—" Her incoherent exclamations mingled with her sobs.

Esperanza drew her to her bosom and comforted her.

Gradually Guadalupe became calmer. "I meant to kill myself, after Alberto—" she stopped.

The man called Alberto—as Esperanza had surmised, the tall carpenter—had abandoned her. When Esperanza wasn't around, he had told Guadalupe they should live together and as soon as he could afford it get married. He had sworn eternal love and happiness. But after four days he had disappeared.

Guadalupe, too shamed to come back to Esperanza, had wandered about hungry, trying to get a job.

Esperanza told her not to feel so badly. "I expected you back. I waited."

"What will I do now?" wailed Guadalupe. "I can't go back to Milpa Verde."

"Why not? There's no need to tell anyone. It is too bad you met a scoundrel instead of an honest man. But if you have been happy even for a few days, that's something to be thankful for."

Finding Esperanza so sympathetic, Guadalupe finally admitted that at heart, she just couldn't stand it to be inexperienced any more, so she pretended a faith in Alberto she really hadn't had.

Little by little she took the whole thing more light-heartedly. By the time they were on the train back to Amecameca, she was almost flippant. Her little head was saying that from now on she was going to enjoy life. Enough of Petra's close-fisted restraint.

But her brazenness received a shock when she discovered she was with child. In Amecameca she bought some abortion herbs which merely made her dreadfully sick.

She finally confessed to Esperanza, said she was going back to Mexico City to stay. She couldn't face Petra and Pablo.

"You can't go alone," decreed Esperanza. "I'll have to go also."

Esperanza made arrangements to give up her work at the school, for which of late she was getting paid.

For the two of them to make enough to live permanently in the city with Rosa would be a problem. But they had quite a stock of goods to dispose of.

For the time being they lived in their former quarters near the

American cemetery, and in the afternoon and evenings—Esperanza had brought her loom—they worked until a late hour.

Because of Rosa, Esperanza wanted a better place nearer town, not so dark and damp.

She ran into Elena, the girl who had befriended her that rainy night in the *Vamos de Nuevo*.

"Of all things!" cried Elena.

Her spangled purple dress, high-heeled silver shoes and broad hat with silver adornments were flashy. She was working at the dance bar *Valenciana* in the *Peravillo* district.

They chatted. Esperanza mentioned she was looking for a place to stay.

Elena at once suggested her own flat in the *Peravillo* section. She had several partly furnished rooms, quite independent, which she had been sharing with another girl now gone off to *Tampico* where the oil boom was on. The rent would be only ten pesos.

Esperanza liked the rooms, so they moved the next day.

Now she would have to get a job. *Guadalupe* was also anxious to work.

Esperanza took her to see Mrs. Caldwell.

The American woman could not use her at the moment.

They looked up the *Sandovals*. They had moved to a *Colonia Roma* apartment house, quite a fashionable place.

Marta greeted them delightedly. Her mother had gone off to *Aguas Calientes* to live with relatives. She was no longer working at the bank. Unfortunately she already had a servant.

Evidently Marta and her mother had come into money again, for Marta was elegantly attired in silk lounging pajamas, and her hands flashed with several costly rings. Esperanza did not recall ever having seen. The apartment, too, was luxuriously furnished—a grand piano with draped Spanish shawl of embroidered red roses, a comfortable divan, oil paintings, a big white bear rug on the polished floor—far different from her former old-fashioned, if luxurious, home in *Santa María*.

They were about to leave. In walked Caldwell, using his own key, not even ringing.

He greeted them offhandedly and would have embraced Marta had she not lifted her eyebrows warningly.

So—this is the story, thought Esperanza.

Caldwell, less friendly to Esperanza, nervously paced up and down with a hard, set look. His brusque manner indicated he

wanted them to leave. But he wrote out an introduction to a family needing a servant.

The people he suggested had already hired someone.

Esperanza next bethought herself of Señora Navarro, not so pleasant, but a job with her could do until Guadalupe found something better.

Señora Navarro, despite their previous unfriendly parting, greeted Esperanza with a broad, pious smirk. She needed no help, but both sons were now married, and the wife of Antoñio, the younger, was about to have a baby. They needed an extra maid.

Guadalupe got the post.

Shortly after this, Esperanza again ran into pock-marked Matilda.

Both were overjoyed. Matilda was still working in the soap factory and offered to get Esperanza a job there.

It was out in the San Antonio Abad district beyond the car barns, a ramshackle building with high, dusty windows, big boiling vats, machinery, the air constantly full of fumes that irritated the nostrils.

Esperanza's ten-hour day—for which she was paid thirty pesos a month—consisted of sitting all day on a high stool, wrapping soap, first the paraffine paper, then the trade-mark wrapper. The astringents soon roughened her hands.

It was a long walk, more than an hour and a half, to and from work. Esperanza was always dog-tired when she got home. She then had to make Rosa bathe and change her clothes, dirtied from playing around in the patio, get supper, sew a bit, after which she usually stumbled over to her mat and dropped off into deep slumber.

Rosa was going to a private school, but she got home first, and was getting into bad habits.

Frequently Esperanza asked herself what she was doing here in the dust and clamor, wrapping soap hour after hour, breathing acid fumes, ruining her health? Her face was growing sallow.

But she could not leave Guadalupe in the lurch. She had promised Petra to look after her carefully.

Elena scolded Esperanza roundly. Why should she toil in such an ungodly fashion for a mere pittance? Esperanza, young, only twenty-six, with a fine figure, should work with Elena in the cantina where she could make easy money.

But Esperanza shook her head. She did not want that, however easy the money. Elena, if she did not stay with some man somewhere, came home about dawn, usually slightly drunk. Often Esperanza met her coming in just as she herself was starting to work.

Sundays, Guadalupe had the afternoon off, and she and Esperanza would go walking or take a street-car ride. Esperanza also made friends with other working girls. Nora, a big girl with a round figure and round forehead with tightly plastered black hair and almond-shaped eyes, was her favorite; and on holidays when Guadalupe was not free, Esperanza would leave Rosa with one of the neighbors and go out with Matilda or Nora or sometimes both to the movies or to a dance.

More and more now, Esperanza brooded over the lack of male affection. But she never met anyone who attracted her strongly or who seemed to desire anything more than her body. Nora, quite a flirt, with the knack of picking up men, would get partners for Esperanza. But the simple, half-adventurous types Nora collected were soon driven off by Esperanza's smartness.

The year rolled into 1919. There was strange talk of more difficulties with the hated United States over petroleum. Rumors of revolts came from all quarters.

José wrote her from Milpa Verde that bandits were again operating in the vicinity. He suspected Majordomo Montesinos of fomenting them. Antonia, Guadalupe's sister, had had small-pox, almost died. There was an epidemic. Father Mateo had been ill with the fever. The crops would be good. But most exciting—José was going to get married in three weeks to Adelita Velásquez—he wanted Esperanza and Guadalupe to be there.

They could not possibly go. Esperanza wrote congratulating them, then later at the eleventh hour she wrote again saying Guadalupe was too ill and sent presents.

Esperanza's industriousness in the factory was rewarded. She was put tending control gauges and raised to forty pesos a month. Though her hands soon looked better, the fumes were worse. She coughed considerably. Still, she was glad for the ten extra pesos—Guadalupe's baby was due next month, and she was no longer working.

They had called on the Caldwells several times, and Mrs. Caldwell kept insisting that Guadalupe see a doctor, but that was too novel and luxurious an idea, a midwife would have to do.

But several days later—Esperanza had just arrived home from work—Dr. Chávez appeared at the door with a little black case.

"What does this mean?" he upbraided Esperanza. "Here your cousin is to have a baby and you never called me?"

"But —"

He wrinkled his nose. "Don't you know, I'm the original baby expert?"

"We—we didn't feel we could afford it, and you helped me out once."

"Fortunately," he said, taking off his coat and rolling up his sleeves, "the Caldwells told me. You can thank them for my being here and for their being more sensible than yourself."

About this time a labor union delegate, Genaro López, a sparse, shabbily dressed man with a dark, broad Indian countenance and spiky, black hair, whose eyes shone with earnest sincerity, began urging the girls and workmen in the soap factory to insist on their rights. The new constitution required an eight-hour day. Other provisions had not been observed. They should form a union. All other factories were organized.

Esperanza, who felt her real life to be in the country, not part of the factory, was not especially interested, but when a meeting was called in a down-town headquarters, Nora and Matilda made her go.

Fifteen workers showed up. After talks by López and by a well-dressed, smooth fellow, more of a politician than a worker, they decided to form a union. A lively, good-natured chap, who tended one of the vats, was made president with five assistants. Esperanza was put up as secretary, and finally, due to Nora's nudging, accepted.

Not very adept at writing letters or keeping records, she had to work at it late at night, hours and hours when she was dead tired. Even so her enthusiasm grew. She and the others talked with everybody in the factory, made them sign up and pay dues.

But after several weeks, the manager, a big red-faced man, who raged and yelled around the factory, sometimes striking the girls, discovered the union. He stormed into the plant and fired the eight officers and several others known to have attended the reunions, including Nora and Matilda.

Esperanza quietly took off her apron and walked with the others out into the afternoon sunlight.

A cold day, she shivered in the wind off snow-covered Ajusco.

An amazed little group, they walked to the nearest corner.

Esperanza had a few pesos in reserve, also embroideries and sashes to sell, but several workers with big families, Nora for instance, were in a bad way.

Esperanza became furious. Why should a red-faced manager have the right suddenly to deprive them of the chance to live? No man should have that power over other human beings.

XLIV

The discharged workers went down to union headquarters and talked to López. The dapperly dressed secretary of the general labor federation came over to discuss things. Workers had been fired from other shops. It was decided to call a strike in all the soap, candy and drug factories.

Esperanza was given a desk at headquarters. She, the head of their union, the delegate and the secretary, worked over the wording of the strike-call—an eight-hour day, seven hours night labor, a week's annual vacation with pay, double pay for overtime, three months' salary to all workers dismissed without due cause. These were all legal rights, specifically guaranteed by the constitution, but honored in the breach.

The handbills were ready the following morning. Eleven of the discharged workers—Matilda had already gotten a job elsewhere—stationed themselves at the factory gates at noon to hand them out. They talked to each worker personally. A strike meeting was called for that evening.

A thousand shabby workers crowded into the dingy hall on Belisario Domínguez street and sat stiffly on the plain, narrow wooden benches, staring at the platform with its flags draped over the rostrum or at the wall pictures of Madero, Carranza the President, Karl Marx, and "the Martyrs of Chicago," men whom Esperanza had been told were foully murdered by Gringo President Cleveland in a strike many years ago on May 1, which was the reason for international labor day.

The poor folk in the audience wore sandals, blue overalls or white peasant pajamas, practically none had coats; the women, bareheaded or with blue rebozos, a few like Esperanza, with black tápalos. Many were old women, wrinkled toil-worn faces, bodies half-broken from child-bearing and hard labor.

Esperanza sat on the platform with the officials of the various unions. She recalled Luis' meeting in Amecameca, and in a flash

saw that this was part of the same struggle. The revolution, the fight for lands, the struggle in Milpa Verde, now the fight of these folk for their jobs and decent treatment—all linked up.

There were many speeches. Mostly simple folk, even though faltering, they made eloquent talks, warm words by a people long dumb, now hungry to express themselves. A strong current of anger and enthusiasm was generated.

The delegate spoke, rumpling his spiky, black hair, rubbing his hands flat-wise down his shabby tan suit with its tufted pockets. Soon his eager sincerity made him forget his stage fright. The dapper general secretary delivered a polished effusion. The vat tender gave a simple, heart-felt talk about babies and bread and hopes for the new day.

Then, of all persons, Rufo Montalván stalked into the hall, swinging his long arms, treading heavily. He mounted the platform and spoke in hard sentences that had a bullet impact. He seemed absolutely honest in his new rôle.

Though vigorous, he had acquired a well-fed paunch, at least in body he was softer, and Esperanza felt a sudden reversion to her old hostility.

Was she too prejudiced? Men do change. He had helped Luis. He had helped José. And now, here he was, talking "general strike" to the same class he had once lashed. But she could not bring herself quite to trust him.

He swept the hall with his driving words. The strike was voted amid shouts. Volunteer pickets were called for. Tomorrow no smoke would pour out of the stacks.

Rufo turned around to talk to López and saw Esperanza.

"Ola!" he greeted her heartily, hands outstretched. "So you are in this strike! Congratulations!" He won her for the moment.

The walk-out was complete. The pickets, with red-and-black arm bands, paced up and down before the closed gate. The soap factory loomed vacant, forlorn; knots of strikers stood at the corners.

The daily papers attacked them viciously. Over night they became the "Red Menace." The Russian revolution, screamed *La Nación*, was invading Mexico. All the customary bunk was poured out.

The following day it rained. The pickets, soaked to the skin, trudged miserable and cold, up and down, up and down. Esperanza took her turn at it all.

The third day the owners rushed a truck-load of strike breakers, protected by armed guards, into the factory. The pickets merely watched sullenly.

But by noon eight hundred workers were milling angrily before the gates. The strike breakers, even with their armed guards, did not dare come out. From the dusty windows, anxious faces occasionally peered out quickly at the angry crowd below.

Suddenly there was a rattle of hoofs. Fifty mounted police, in brown and black uniforms, whirled around the corner; drew rein.

The strikers eyed them balefully.

Obedying the command of a young officer, the police moved forward slowly, calling on the strikers to disperse.

The crowd remained ominously still.

The police pushed firmly against the sullen mass.

It refused to yield.

They struck out with the flat side of their sabres.

A rock struck a policeman on the arm. His sabre clattered to the cobble-stones. Other rocks followed—a hail of stones. The crowd of strikers pushed determinedly against the police.

At a curt order, the police whirled out and away, and came back at a gallop.

The first ranks of strikers scrambled aside, but the rest could not give so easily, and the police struck in earnest now.

For the moment the strikers were separated, confused, but they were so numerous that the police charge was halted and broken. The police themselves were separated, so many islands of agitated brown and black, struggling in a swirling tide. One policeman went down in the *mêlée*.

His fallen horse kicked a girl in the side. The strikers sent it galloping wild-eyed down the road, and booing roughly, hustled the policeman back toward his fellows.

The police re-formed. Sheathing their sabres, they swung their guns around from their backs. At an order, the cartridges clicked into place.

But still the strikers stood there, armed only with their feelings of justice, their empty stomachs, and their wrath.

Again the law advanced, guns in hand. Again the strikers were ordered to disperse.

Nobody moved.

The police fired over the heads of the crowd.

More rocks flew.

Angered, the police fired directly into the crowd.

Two women and one man fell, others were wounded.

Another body of mounted police unexpectedly charged up a side street, sabres in hand, and without halting drove headlong into the crowd.

Surprised thus on the flank, the strikers, stricken with fear, frantically scampered for safety. Men and women struggled in insane fright to avoid the hoofs and sabres. One striker had his shoulder sliced open, the bone splintered. The crowd ran screaming in every direction.

Esperanza, caught in the tide, saw a horse loom over her, dodged a sabre blow, then was flung by the frightened mass back against the building.

Panting, her clothes torn, her hair awry, she supported herself there for a second.

A space opened. She ran around the corner.

Everybody was running. One man stopped several times in the block to shake his fist and curse the police.

Esperanza, her heart hot with hate, went on down to strike headquarters.

It was already buzzing with angry workers. Similar scenes had occurred at other factories.

Esperanza stayed on with the union heads, López and several of the more active girls. They decided to send a delegation to protest to the governor of the Federal District and to President Carranza.

While they were discussing this, a squadron of rifle-armed police, led by a broad-shouldered captain, clattered up the stairs.

"Take 'em off," he said sourly.

All six present were led down the stairs.

Behind them, they could hear the rest of the policemen smashing up the benches and typewriters.

Esperanza and two of her companions spent the night in the gloomy damp Belén Jail, where she and Matilda had gone to see María Teresa. Where the others had been taken she did not know.

Esperanza was panic-stricken, not for herself but because Rosa would not find her home and would not know where she was. The child would have a terrible fright. She tried to send out a note to Guadalupe. Permission was denied. And if she had to stay here indefinitely —

XLV

Vermin and worry did not let Esperanza sleep much that night in jail.

The following morning, she was marched through the street with common women, prostitutes, thieves, dopes and others, over to the main police station on Victoria street, where they were all herded into a dirty refuse-cluttered little patio, smelling of urine.

Esperanza, called first, was brought into headquarters before General Palomero Sánchez, who was shouting in loud, foul language to a secretary, much to the amusement of other uniformed men.

He whirled on Esperanza with more foul language. "Sit down, little whore," he barked, and went on dictating.

He thought foul language was funny and manly.

A ruddy man, nearing forty, heavy set, with puffed-out, red-brown lips, and a big, bushy Kaiser moustache. He was obviously conceited, ignorant, vulgar, brutal, braggadocio, tricky, and greedy for food, drink, women, showy uniforms, money and power. He considered himself clever, above reproach and the next president of the country. He was, in short, a typical revolutionary general. Few countries have ever produced more contemptible specimens of humanity than those known as the Mexican "general."

Sánchez whirled around to Esperanza, stroked his handle-bar moustache and looked her over from head to foot. His face relaxed into a big, lascivious grin.

"Why, you're too pretty a chicken to get mixed up in strikes."

"We have to eat. We have legal rights. We thought the government, if it did not want to help the workers, at least would desire to enforce its own laws."

"Ho, ho!" he roared, as though he had heard a bawdy joke. "You know it all by heart, don't you. A few politicians are dragging you girls around by the nose."

Coming around to the front of his desk, he sat there, swinging one leg.

"You've got a nice figure, little pidgeon. You ought to be thinking of love instead of messing around in the gutters."

Her cheeks flushed violently.

The general slapped his leg. "Say, Major, I think I'll turn her

over to you. How'd you like to tuck her into bed, if she really wants a tussle with the police —"

The major guffawed. "I've seen worse."

Esperanza stood up. "You can bait me. You have the power, but you are cowardly and cheap. My husband died for the revolution. My brother lost an eye. My grandfather was foully killed. They fought for what you and your kind have betrayed."

The general looked at her narrowly. "What's your brother doing now?"

"He's head of the Social Defense near Amecameca."

"Hm—" He consulted a list, turned to an orderly. "Bring in Magdalena Domínguez"—one of Esperanza's companions.

"You, my pretty spit-fire, are free." He waved a heavy hand toward the door. "You can go, but don't get brought back here."

As she went out the door, she heard: "Nice legs, Major."

The other girls got off, too. But López and the vat tender, though both had large families, languished in the penitentiary with sedition charges hanging over them for more than a year, in fact until the Obregón revolution changed the scene.

And so, thanks to the police and the government, the strike was lost. Only a few workers ever got their jobs back. Esperanza didn't even try.

She was concerned now about Guadalupe, though Dr. Chávez said she was in perfect condition and there was nothing to fear.

XLVI

Guadalupe's baby, a boy, big and bouncing, was brought into the world at the American hospital, where the Caldwells insisted on sending her, and was duly baptized Tadeo.

As soon as possible, Guadalupe and Esperanza took him over to the Caldwell's.

"It's the cutest, healthiest thing!" cried Mrs. Caldwell. "Just look at it, Ida."

Ida tilted her head in a professional fashion, adjusting her glasses.

"Would—would you and Mr. Caldwell be its godparents?" stammered Esperanza.

"Of course! Delighted!" exclaimed Caldwell heartily, his wife also. "As a matter of fact, we already are."

Esperanza knew that he was thinking of the days when Wini-fred was a baby.

"We may be up to Magdalena before long," remarked Caldwell. "I've got some business out that way."

"You will look us up?—We live very humbly. We —"

"That we understand," said Caldwell. "Things in the villages are not as here. But you will be able to help me with some information. It will benefit your village greatly —"

Esperanza was puzzled as to what this might mean.

A few weeks later, she, Guadalupe, Rosa and Tadeo, were back in Milpa Verde.

Happy, they jogged into the village on burros. Little Rosa was fiercely proud; this was the first time she had ever ridden by herself.

Esperanza, watching her, was filled with joy. Rosa was already so beautiful and full of health. Left with others often, she had early acquired the ability to feel at ease with people. Esperanza determined to work hard to give Rosa the things she herself had been denied.

They stopped first at José's house, near San Benito.

José and Adelita, overjoyed, pulled them off and hugged them.

The surprise of Guadalupe's baby was communicated.

Adelita lifted the cloth from his brown face. "How fat he is!"

Young Tadeo stared at her out of swimming, black eyes, pools in the round hills of his pudgy face, and as the sun was very bright, puckered up his face and yowled.

Esperanza observed Adelita—a tall, swift-moving woman with great dignity and self-control. She made Esperanza feel that she, herself, no longer had a rightful place in José's house.

Presently, though, José was shouting out: "I'll be taking your things off the burro. Which are yours?"

Esperanza detected a slight frown on Adelita's patrician face.

"But where is Bobo?" cried Esperanza.

"Well—you see—" José stammered. "When one gets married—Well—Ignacio is taking care of him."

"Oh!" Esperanza, who had a surprise present for Bobo, was hurt. Adelita had done that.

Guadalupe, anxious to avoid explanations about Tadeo, also to get on home, said she would go on ahead.

"I'll be down in a few minutes," Esperanza called after her.

Near home, Guadalupe became timorous, wished she had waited for Esperanza. How would her mother receive the baby?

Guadalupe leaned over the child. Her eyes filled. She was glad,

terribly glad she had it. She had always felt so unsettled, full of wild whims, crazy notions. Now her life had a pivot, meaning. Nothing else in the world mattered.

The cactus fence—Guadalupe jogged ahead, kicking at her burro with her sharp heels.

There was Petra—sitting in the doorway.

"Mama! Mama!" bawled Guadalupe.

Petra, surprised, beamed, padded forward at a heavy trot.

Guadalupe slid off stiffly, her bundled-up Tadeo in her arms.

Petra kissed her. "What are you carrying? It looks just like —"

Guadalupe folded back the cloth from the baby's face.

Petra stared amazed. "A baby. Such a fat little thing! Whose is it?"

"Mine. All mine."

"Yours!" Petra stopped short, thunderstruck. Her short, solid body struck roots. "Yours! And you didn't send me word, not even when you were married, not even when you had the baby!"

Rapidly she made her calculations. "Why," she stormed, "you were married before ever you left here. Why —"

"Don't get excited, mama. I'm not married."

"Not—" Petra's big mouth dropped. She shook all over. She rustled.

Guadalupe, smiling, poked her finger playfully at Tadeo.

Petra exploded. "You have the nerve to tell me this, to bring an ill-begotten baby home? You want to disgrace us all?"

"Mama —"

Petra shook with anger. "Go back to the man who begot it in you, hear? Let *him* take care of you. You bring us disgrace and still expect us to feed you and your child besides." She was close to tears.

Guadalupe, since the evening she'd been caught in the embrace of the Zapatista, had never seen her mother quite so wrought up.

Petra went storming on, "I brought you up to know better. To be decent. Always you were wild, getting into stupid scrapes, never listening, pig-headed. I'll have no immoral daughter in my house, we, having to go among the neighbors with shamed heads —"

Guadalupe's heart sank, but quietly she tethered her burro across the lane under an overhanging willow, then came back and sat down on a stone near the front door.

She didn't know just what to do. Petra, once she set herself on her haunches, was a mule, a stone, a rock of ages.

Guadalupe had no money to go back to the city. She thought of going back up to José's house, but Adelita, she judged, was not too fond of relatives, especially a mere cousin, burdened with a baby besides.

It was not, Guadalupe reflected, that she had had her baby without benefit of clergy. That was mostly expected. But she could not produce the man. If she had lied a bit, saying her husband was in Mexico City, Petra would have been piqued, but would have greeted a grandchild with joy. Guadalupe scolded herself for having been so simple.

Esperanza came down. "Of all things!" she exploded. "Petra's foolish."

But Petra was deaf to anything anybody might say.

Pablo came in, greeting Esperanza heartily.

Petra told him of Guadalupe, a hot lava flow of bitter words.

He whistled. "Ho! The chicken has eaten eggs though it burned her bill —"

But he couldn't see why so much fuss. He scratched his head whimsically.

Esperanza appealed to him. "You are a grandfather. It's a beautiful child."

"By gum, that's right." He started out to see it.

But for almost the first time in forty-eight years, Petra was converted into a fury. "You shall not let her in. Against her this door is closed. The Huitróns have all been honorable folk; and we, the Pérezes, just as honorable."

Esperanza argued.

Between the fussing of the two women, Pablo was reduced to stunned amazement. Guadalupe should not have made such a mistake. But she was his girl. It was their grandchild. What was done was done. You didn't get anywhere bucking nature. Left to himself, he would not have thought a second time about it.

"What God gives—" he began.

"Not God, the devil," hissed Petra. "Just take your monotonous proverbs back. 'Whoever spits at the sky, spits in his own face,' and that's what your daughter, *your* daughter, has done."

"My daughter—" He struggled with this new concept of solitary ownership. Petra was handing Guadalupe over to him like a screw of paper from Doña Gracia's store.

"Spots fall on the finest cloth," he said mildly.

"You can't make the whooping cough into a hen's cackle," exploded Petra.

Guadalupe was to be shut out. The front door would remain closed. No one would use it till Guadalupe took her worthless bones away.

Petra gave instructions to Pablo, Jr., now a respectable, sturdy nineteen, not to talk to his sister, nor might Toña, either.

Esperanza went back to Guadalupe. "Petra won't listen. Come on home with me to José's."

Guadalupe shook her head. A chip off the old block, she replied firmly, "I belong here. I can't shove myself on Adelita. My parents have no right to disown me."

A strange silent duel began. Hour after hour Guadalupe sat in front of Pablo Huitrón's house, motionless, except when she gave her breast to Tadeo.

The news spread. On the pretext of going to the town hall, people walked casually past. A few dared chat with Guadalupe.

Everyone was aching to talk to Petra about it, but she went to Gracia's store, to San Benito, about all her duties, with a hard, set face.

The first afternoon of the duel, Bobo came running up to Guadalupe, a shining brass object in his hand.

"Look! Look!" he shouted, his eyes popping from his head.

Guadalupe already knew what it was—a trombone Esperanza had bought for him—it had cost a lot of money—in Mexico City. Aarón, the village band trombone player, had promised he would teach the dwarf to play it.

"Esperanza bought it for me!" he screamed with utter joy. "And I can play it already!"

He made eerie sounds on it. "I'm the trumpeter of the Lord!" he shouted. "The walls will fall! The walls will fall!"

After that, Bobo sat beside Guadalupe day after day for hours on end, practicing on his trombone, much to Petra's fury, for it was as though he were the official herald of her shame to the world.

When not playing, he just squatted there like a little buzzard, staring at the trees as though expecting carrion.

He was very much interested in the baby and made gurgling sounds every time Guadalupe let him look at it.

"It will sit on shiny stairs where the shiny stars look down," he would repeat, which for some reason pleased Gaudalupe immensely.

Esperanza brought Guadalupe food, which also made Petra wrathful.

After several bitter arguments with Petra, Esperanza finally lost her own temper, and said she would never come to see her any more.

"You are a stupid, old fool. The whole village is beginning to hate you like poison."

Petra merely snorted.

XLVII

Despite her iron determination to shut Guadalupe out, Petra was torn by constant emotion by the drama she had helped create. Guadalupe was her own flesh and blood. So was the child. She remembered her own children, the nursing of them, how they had grown up. And here was a new child claiming her protection, and she was denying it. She wanted to have the baby in her arms.

And so, the fourth morning, Petra flung open the front door, muttering to herself that one couldn't live with the house closed up and the front yard full of rubbish. Fussily she swept with a twig brush, making far more dust than was necessary.

Guadalupe, just then nursing Tadeo, had to move out of the way over to the little pine tree near the stoop.

Petra swept and swept and muttered and muttered. Out of the corner of her eye, she was looking at the baby, suckling at Guadalupe's buxom breast.

The child did not seem satisfied. He pulled at the teat, wailed, pulled again. Guadalupe was looking very peaked.

After sweeping the yard, Petra fussed at the shrubbery.

"The morning-glories were beautiful this morning," said Guadalupe.

"Yes," snorted Petra. "Hm—hm—the mornings are cold now."

"Yes. It is cold. I am still cold. The sun gets to this side very late."

"Hm—hm—" fussed Petra. "Get you inside and have some hot coffee."

Guadalupe went in quietly, concealing her triumph.

But Petra would not talk to her further. She had decided to

show Guadalupe charity, nothing more; the young mother should not for one moment be allowed to forget the enormity of her offense.

And so, more than ever now, the baby was constantly before Petra's eyes; she longed to take it into her arms. She watched Guadalupe doing things for the child, watched as a cat watches a mouse. Inwardly she was raging, for Guadalupe was doing everything, absolutely everything, wrong. Petra ached to show her the proper way. It would be a wonder, she kept muttering to herself, if the child ever grew up.

Gradually Pablo, Jr., and the two other children talked with Guadalupe, although Petra's stern air caused them to do so in covert whispers as though trespassing. Whenever they did, Petra fussed and banged and scolded about the place.

If Guadalupe was something of an unwelcome guest in her parents' house, neither did Esperanza feel at home in José's house.

After a little doubtful sniffing at each other, Esperanza and Adelita got along famously. And her new sister-in-law was nice enough to Rosa. But Adelita had such a decided personality that Esperanza constantly felt herself to be an intruder.

Esperanza's dream was to buy herself a home and settle permanently in the village. And so now she worked hard, weaving and embroidering from dawn till dark, so she could become quite independent.

The only problem in this scheme was Rosa. For her sake, Esperanza would prefer to live in the city so she could be sent to a proper school. Esperanza herself had moments when the sluggish village ways made her restless. But usually her restlessness was quickly appeased by her trips to the city to sell. After a week or so of dust and clamor, she was always eager to get back.

But before anything else, Esperanza wanted to attend to another matter long on her conscience—remove Luis' body from the potters' field and have a proper headstone made.

Largely for this purpose, again she traveled to Mexico City and went right out to his grave in Dolores.

It was gone!

Was she mistaken in its location? She walked here and there in a fever to make sure, then rushed over to the caretaker's, near the street-car entrance.

A nonchalant elderly man, tall, with big bony hands, told her

it was customary to dig the bodies up after a certain number of years and cremate them. The ashes were not saved.

He put on a pair of specs and looked up the record.

Luis' body had been removed three weeks previous to date.

Esperanza stared at his peaked face and long nose. "Yes—Yes—" she said mechanically. Two tears trickled down her face.

She wandered off in a daze, accusing herself bitterly of carelessness. There was nothing to do now but forget about it. The past was really burying its dead.

She went back to Milpa Verde to face an autumn come early and cold, with sad winds wailing down from the volcanoes.

In November, though, the weather was better.

One day—Esperanza was at Petra's—Caldwell, his wife, and Ida, rode up to the cactus fence and dismounted.

Esperanza came running to them and led them inside the yard. She called to Pablo, Jr., to tend to their horses.

Guadalupe appeared, and they all greeted each other like long-lost friends.

"Petra! Petra! We have visitors!" cried Esperanza.

Petra peered out the door, ducked back, then came out embarrassedly drying her hands on her dress and was introduced to the godparents of her grandchild.

Petra, of the old school, was awed by these rich, white foreigners. Here were "people of reason" treating Guadalupe as an equal, and what was more, had brought gifts, clothes, toys, a purse of five pesos for little Tadeo. If such people, automatically above criticism, however queer their ways, did not think Guadalupe was terrible, everything must be all right. This was her final defeat in her moral struggle with Guadalupe.

Amused, Esperanza watched the shift of ideas in her aunt's now beaming face, as Guadalupe shyly showed the Caldwells her baby, and they all exclaimed over it.

"We are staying at the hacienda house," said Mrs. Caldwell. "Bring the baby up tomorrow."

The visit of the Caldwells also helped Petra reestablish her own dignity in the eyes of her neighbors. Those in nearby huts peeked curiously through the cactus fences at her guests. Up at Gracia's store, Petra remarked casually: "You should have seen the nice dresses, and of all things—knit shoes—which Tadeo's grandparents brought him. They are very fine folk, indeed."

Overnight, toward Guadalupe, she became excessively affec-

tionate. Now she could fondle Tadeo to her heart's content and scold Guadalupe for not doing things right.

Esperanza and especially Guadalupe were aflutter over the proposed visit to the Big House, though they had never felt so when calling on the Caldwells in the city. But here the division between peasantry and gentry was so defined, and everyone knew what everybody else did.

They dressed up in their city clothes and put on the baby's blue silk cap with big ribbons and the fluffy blue dress and knit shoes. He looked so unbelievably cute that Petra's heart almost burst. And Rosa, too, wore a new green dress.

And so, about five o'clock, very self-conscious, they walked over.

They were taken in through the cool corridor, lined with potted plants, right into the big salon.

Mrs. Caldwell made them sit down and took Tadeo in her arms.

Ida, about twelve now, stared at the baby through her big lensed spectacles. Solemn and awed, she asked: "Will it be an Indian, too?"

Ida and Rosa got along famously. Presently Ida had her over on the Moorish divan, showing her the doll she had brought along.

Esperanza stole glances around. The old furnishings were mostly gone. The pictures had disappeared. But there was the stone idol, Huitzilopochtli, once the awe of the villagers. Esperanza shuddered at the old memories connected with it—María Teresa—Bobo—"Stone in the flesh"—one never got the stone out of the flesh —

But now the villagers, living more independently of the hacienda, rarely talked about the stone idol.

Mrs. Caldwell kept her guests for some time. Her broken Spanish did not allow for very extended conversation, but they had a jolly time trying to understand each other. Eagerly Esperanza and Guadalupe told her the names of things.

Tea and cakes were served. As a servant for Caldwell and Señora Navarro, Esperanza had often served tea, but to be invited like any one else of the better classes was an experience.

In the midst of this, Caldwell and Majordomo Montesinos came in. A slight frown settled on Montesinos' puffy face at this obvious rupture of class lines. But when he saw how merrily

Caldwell greeted Esperanza and Guadalupe, he made the best of it.

Taking Esperanza's hand, he recognized her. "Well, this is peace after all," he said sourly, and stretched his neck oddly.

Turning to Caldwell, he spoke rapidly in English.

Caldwell looked at her more interestedly.

Presently Montesinos bowed and left.

Caldwell asked Esperanza about the revolutionary days, the fighting on the hacienda, the battle here in the salón, the last election, the incident in the ravine, how the agrarians had won.

"Montesinos tells me your brother is head of the Social Defense." She nodded.

Caldwell looked thoughtful. "I might as well tell you the truth. Our bank, named receiver by the courts, is temporarily taking over the hacienda. But this agrarianism is dangerous for us."

Impulsively Esperanza exclaimed, "Oh, I do hope you do take charge. You would be more just. All these fights would stop."

Caldwell looked at her keenly. "The hacienda title, you know, includes the lands now occupied by the village."

"But the government has granted us provisional ownership. Probably it will be made permanent. The new constitution gives us the legal right to them. The hacienda is so large. What does it need with a few stony acres that are rightfully ours? Left with them in peace, we would make no trouble."

Caldwell did not explain that Montesinos had complained that since the villagers had lands, the hacienda had to pay higher wages. Nor did he tell her that a bank might prove more hard-hearted.

As for himself, he felt that if the hacienda was to be improved and become profitable, it had to live in peace with the various villages. The hacienda did not have a single head of cattle. Armed bands had driven everything off. There were continuous depredations, killing of hacienda workers, stealing. Activities were at a standstill. To fight the villages was a penny-wise, pound-foolish policy.

He told her he intended to recommend to the bank that the agrarians be pacified. "I'd like to talk it over with your brother."

On the morrow, Caldwell came over.

"Can I talk to you alone?" he asked Esperanza.

They walked up the lane.

Caldwell was embarrassed—the only time Esperanza had ever seen him so.

“Do you know where Pepita is?” he asked. “I didn’t like to ask her father down at Estrella.”

Esperanza told him what she knew. “She’s lost her good looks and is becoming a dumpy housewife.”

He laughed good-humoredly. “To the victor belong the spoils. It all turned out the best way. And I have Winifred. She’s beautiful, Esperanza. She believes her mother to be dead.”

“She doesn’t —”

“Why shouldn’t she? Her mother abandoned her. Both now live in utterly different worlds. Winifred would derive only heartache from knowing her mother. And Pepita is probably glad to bury the past.”

She introduced him to José.

José was stand-offish, his one good eye screwed hard.

Caldwell at once asked whether, if the bank should relinquish all title to the supposed village lands, José would guarantee peace?

José agreed stiffly. “But, of course, if there is to be real peace, then there should be an end of discrimination against our members when work is given. And if the light plant is ever started up again, the hacienda should let the village buy current. The hacienda should also let us take pasturage lands on shares or some other arrangement.”

Caldwell nodded. “All very sensible.”

Gradually José thawed out.

After Caldwell had gone, José was jubilant. “I hope he does take over the hacienda. If all the owners were like him, Mexico’s problems would be settled over night. There would be better times all around.”

Both José and Esperanza felt that the godfather of little Tadeo could not possibly go back on his word. Everything was really going to work out happily for everybody.

But again the times grew more troubled, but apparently things were taking a turn for the better. Carranza fled from the capital and was murdered in the Vera Cruz mountains, and Obregón entered the city triumphantly at the head of 50,000 soldiers, including his fear-inspiring Yaqui Indian legions—Esperanza could imagine how the cathedral bells were tolling for the new “savior”—and Obregón had definitely promised the villages more lands.

“If Caldwell keeps his promise—” repeated José.

"Why, the cactus and the magueys will still keep on growing," cried Bobo, who had just come up. He leapt on a big stone.

"And we hope, soon green corn as well," said Esperanza.

"Between the rocks, green corn—Between the rocks—Between rocks." And Bobo went skipping off.

PART V



LOVE AND BATTLE



V

LOVE AND BATTLE

XLVIII

ESPERANZA was displaying her wares in the Mercedes Market in Mexico City.

It was sunny, warm, drowsy. Strange weather for November.

The sunlight glowed on the bright colored street—clear, sharp, upland light of the South.

The sunlight was a magic brew distilled out of the god-like, amber nectar of flowers, laziness, perfumes, and strong reds and yellows.

It flooded over everything, dazzling the eyes, and seemed to live again like a glowing coal in the heart of every object. The stones, the many-tinted walls, the white canvas over the market stalls, the heaps of percale and calico—all seemed to be giving off light.

Every object seemed sharply etched, but light so inundated everything that actually sun and shade blended, like a strange gray yellow, mixing of good and evil, love and cruelty.

Esperanza sat there, eyes half closed to shut out the silver sheen. The warmth coursed through her body. A delicious languor invaded her limbs.

How glorious it would be to go bathing in the Huitzo up in Milpa Verde!

A young man stopped to look at her things. He fingered the long red sashes.

She paid him little attention. Let him look his fill. Her thoughts were now centered on Rosa, whom she had left with Petra.

Her glance followed the bright shoulder of sunlight that had been advancing toward her feet, almost like a lover.

It moved forward, embraced her feet, her ankles, sent its fire through her legs. It stamped its kiss of light on her knees.

Her face grew flushed. She felt faint.

Suddenly she realized that her customer was examining her as well as her wares. She stiffened.

He ran a sash through his long white hands, almost affectionately.

"Very beautiful work," he remarked —

The expected note of familiarity was absent.

"Do you do it yourself?" he asked.

"I wove the cloth and embroidered it—both."

"How much is it?"

"Seven pesos exact."

"Impossible! Ridiculous!" he exclaimed. "I'll give you three."

Her interest in him increased—he was a good bargainer.

She sniffed. "You just said it is good work. Your offer is insulting."

She took stock of him. Without hat, his trousers smeared with paint, blue flannel shirt open at the tanned throat, despite his poor attire he had an independent air. His eyes were two burning coals, and his chin was strong and rectangular. A big mane of curly, black hair tumbled over his broad, high forehead, dappled with sunlight.

They argued and argued over the price, now sternly, now laughing.

Finally she gave him the sash for four seventy-five, not quite her minimum. She wrapped it up in a piece of newspaper.

He counted the money into her hand, then looked at her with a broad friendly smile, and said in a cool tone: "You are very beautiful—a most interesting type."

Looking directly into his dark eyes, she was startled by his glowing admiration into gratified vanity, but again stiffened.

He looked down at his package thoughtfully. His lips, she noticed, were full but pleasantly curved, softening what otherwise would have been a hard, proud face.

"Yes"—he rubbed his chin absent-mindedly—"you are a most unusual type."

"We are all alike in Milpa Verde, where I come from," she said.

"I doubt that," he drawled. "If true, I shall go there to paint."

"Oh!" Remembering Joaquín's paintings in the Big House—they must have cost a lot of money—she was awed. But why was this young man so poorly dressed in dauby trousers? But just looking at him she knew he had to be a good painter.

"Yes," he said speculatively, examining her intently. "You are

very unusual. Your body is quite remarkable. You have a bust like a Greek goddess. I just have to paint you."

She stared at him blankly.

"Stand out here where I can see all of you."

To her own amazement, she obeyed, smoothing down her dress, just as she would have done ten years ago when she first came to the city as a simple rustic.

Again he looked her over. "Marvelous! Marvelous!" he murmured. "Such shoulders! Those flanks. I'll go crazy. And your skin—that velvety, smooth texture with the deep brown flush in it. Just right."

Involuntarily she turned her head to look at her own shoulders and body. Then the whole thing struck her as ridiculous.

"Young man, I'm not a mare or a cow."

"I'll say you're not," he rejoined. "Will you come to my studio and let me paint you?"

Her eyes opened wide. The idea was too novel. She shook her head.

He argued. He offered her a peso an hour.

A great deal of money. Thinking of Rosa and the house she hoped to buy, she was tempted.

She looked at him again. Obviously he was not just playing a game with her.

"All right," she said grudgingly.

"Fine! Fine!" He literally danced. "Everyone will be envious."

He gave her the address and described an atelier beside San Ignacio church.

"Go in through the churchyard. If you are afraid to come alone, bring some one with you. Ask for David Muñoz."

She promised faithfully to be there at ten o'clock—the light then was best.

But after he had gone, she grew frightened. The whole thing was so utterly strange. Was it completely honorable? A peso an hour! Incredible!

All the rest of the day she was like a somnambulist.

How handsome and strong he had seemed!

Like that arm of sunlight in the market, he had, in some mystic way, embraced her ankles and kissed her knees. She was happy and afraid.

And with it all was mixed up her dreams about Milpa Verde—Rosa—the house she would buy —

She went to the studio, and alone. But as she turned into the churchyard, her knees quaked.

With a final look back at the crowded street, she gathered all her courage and lifted the heavy dog-head knocker.

A long hollow echo answered. Then footsteps.

He opened the door.

"You're here!" he cried, cordially. "I was so afraid you wouldn't come."

He led her around a big Chinese screen to a large, barn-like place with enormous side windows, and, above, a skylight with sliding cheesecloth curtain. The studio was cluttered with paintings, easels and other art objects. A large couch with dilapidated black covering looked rather lost in the big room.

Toward one end, near a window, was a raised stand, in front of it a large easel with a wheel and steel cogs. Tables were heaped with drawings, paints, saucers full of ground colors, brushes, instruments, books.

Plenty of dust. Evidently he didn't have any one to clean it regularly. Esperanza had an instantaneous womanly desire to straighten everything up.

"This is what I've been working on," he said, standing off from an easel, his head tilted, eyes squinting.

A nude woman was stretching out her arm to take a banana from a heaped brass bowl of fruit.

Esperanza drew her breath delightfully—the colors were so lush and sensuous. But fear struck her. Surely he did not expect her to pose in the nude.

He surmised her thoughts. "I'd like to do a head of you," he said, casually, "with your blue rebozo. But suppose we just sit down and talk awhile. I haven't got quite the idea for the setting."

He showed her half a dozen portraits of Indian types.

"Why that one looks just like old Clemente who died!" she exclaimed.

Pleased by her remark, he asked all about Clemente and her village.

Before long, she was telling him about the election fights, their struggle for land, how she had been wounded.

His eyes brightened. He ran his hands through his bushy hair and sat forward eagerly in his chair.

He told her that similar struggles had happened in hundreds

of villages. The people of the different villages ought to get together and help each other out.

She was surprised—most city people were hostile to the agrarians. She told him about her strike experiences.

"That's fine! Marvelous!" he exclaimed, hitting his knee. "And here I was thinking you were just an ordinary dumb market woman. I might have known. That face of yours. There's character in it."

Gradually she ceased to have any fear of him or the place.

"How I would like to paint some of the scenes you describe!" he exclaimed. "Old Alvaro in the town hall. The battle. I'll really have to go up to Milpa Verde. If I could paint it all, it would be epic."

He looked at his watch. "My God, nearly one o'clock. Can you come back tomorrow at the same hour, ten o'clock?"

She hesitated. She had wasted three hours and had sold none of her wares. She wanted soon to return to Milpa Verde.

Before she could answer, he went to a drawer, took out three pesos and handed them to her.

"But," she stammered. "I haven't posed. We just talked."

He smiled. "You have given me three hours. Talking is part of my work. To draw a model, I have to know all I can about her. Then the lines"—he made an undulating motion—"mean something."

This was Greek to Esperanza. She hesitated.

He closed her fingers over the money. "So—you will come again in the morning. I'm anxious to start now. You can help me greatly."

The following morning, after another long talk, David had her sit on the platform.

He stood looking at her with a puzzled expression. "I wish you had your loom—I have it."

He brought her a straw mat. "Unravel part of this and start weaving again. How do you sit when you weave?—Fine! —"

She sat cross-legged, the mat in her hand.

"Just keep on weaving. Don't pay any attention to me."

He vanished behind his easel, soon was daubing away. He would look at her intently, palette and brush in hand, or would hold up his brush to squint at her to measure the proportions. Mostly silent, now and then he grunted to himself.

Once or twice he made her get up and walk around. Even

then he kept on working feverishly. He seemed a different person when he worked; his words were crisp, not friendly. She was just an object.

She considered him. He was kind, honest, generous, but headstrong with youth. He had an impetuous will that hit one like a lash. But painting there so intently, after a while a bit weary, more and more he looked just like a small boy.

She left about twelve-thirty. That afternoon she hurried to sell her stock—only a little left now.

The following morning, she told him she expected to leave next day for Milpa Verde.

"No! No!" He stamped his foot vexed. "Impossible! I've just begun. It will spoil everything. I can't take this up later when it's cold. I have to keep right on. You must stay."

She told him of the pressing things she had to do in Milpa Verde—Her stock sold, she had to keep on weaving—Rosa —

"You simply can't leave!" he expostulated. "I'll get you more posing with other artists. There's Fernando—he could pay you two pesos a sitting. And Lida, the German-Mexican artist—she could use you. And Roberto. You could make plenty."

The chance to earn money so easily weighed the scales. In a day she could clear nearly as much as on an entire trip selling in the market.

The following morning, Fernando came in, a tall, sallow, one-legged fellow with big, thick-lensed glasses and fierce upstanding hair. His mouth had a bitter sardonic expression; he glared furiously through his thick lenses.

As soon as he saw Esperanza on the platform, straw mat in hand, he hobbled around and around her, then looked at David's canvas. Coming back, he glared at her again. "What a model!"

Despite his glare, he was a sad, tender soul, very comprehending.

Several days later, Lida came in, a slender creature with a twisted back. She, too, was glad to paint Esperanza.

And so Esperanza became a professional model and began to earn four to eight pesos a day, far more than the average. David had become so frantic when she said she wouldn't pose, he forgot all about bargaining.

He finished the first picture and started another.

"I've got to paint you and paint you until I get you out of my system, if I ever do. The more I know of you, the more I discover."

Every time she spoke of returning to Milpa Verde, he shook all over and lost his temper. To himself he decided that if she did, he would follow her there.

But it was hard now for her to break away. She was posing for three or four artists, and each was at a particular stage on his particular painting.

"You should send for Rosa," suggested David. "Why don't you put her in a Mexico City school next term? I know a good one, not expensive."

This was something she wanted. She sent a letter to Guadalupe, who by now would have accumulated quite a stock of goods, to come with Rosa.

"Bring all my belongings," she wrote, "and the loom, also."

She was anxious to help David in every way.

Fernando temporarily finished with her, but another artist, Martín Arbaiza filled in her time.

Secretly crazy to paint her in the nude, David schemed. One morning, he had the model for the canvas he had shown Esperanza the first day on the stand, posing nude.

Casually David waved Esperanza to a chair and continued with his work.

Esperanza gazed at the girl—a handsome type with a creamy skin, big high breasts, very long well-shaped legs, but rather narrow shoulders, and arms a bit flat on the under side, an interesting, if not well-proportioned body.

Mine is much better, thought Esperanza, with instinctive vanity.

The model's face was also unusual, slanting almond eyes, an Oriental expression accentuated by low bangs, just above high pencilled eyebrows. Something in her face suggested Sasha.

"That's all, Elenor," David finally said, curtly.

The girl got up stiffly and massaged one foot as naturally as though in her own home fully dressed. Hobbling off the platform, she threw a silk robe over her shoulders.

She wore a stunning red gown, gold buttons from hem to high collar, that emphasized her long slinky lines, her big, pouting lips and flirtatious slant eyes. The perky motion of her high French heels jiggled her all over.

Esperanza, in her simple clothes, with her olive brown skin, wondered how David for a moment could imagine she, herself, to be a wonderful model. It did not occur to her that a painter

sees lines, masses, texture, color, not class or race distinctions, except as the latter give meaning to the individual.

With a suggestive movement of her hips, Elenor tapped across the room to glance at the painting.

"You paint me as though I was merely meant to be slept with," she said, with a grimace.

"True enough." He laughed and put his arms about her, then gave her a little pat to hasten her out the door.

Esperanza felt a twinge of jealousy.

"Now for my real model!" he cried to Esperanza and set to work.

The following morning, Elenor was there again, also another painter, Francisco Romano, a pimply, little fellow with a funny way of jerking his head.

He examined David's painting with creased eyes.

"I don't think you quite have it here." Romano motioned to a part of the canvas. "That shadow throws the balance out. Slice down the hip a bit, so —"

He walked over to Elenor and slid his hand down her thigh to indicate what he meant—just as though she had been a stick of wood.

But Elenor didn't seem to mind.

The two painters went on gravely discussing the technical problem.

Francisco remarked that in a week he would like to paint Esperanza.

When the others had gone, David remarked to her: "Elenor's body is better than quite a few of our models, but not remarkable. Now your body—what a delight that would be to paint! Elenor couldn't hold a candle to you. I could paint a real masterpiece of you."

Esperanza gave him no encouragement.

XLIX

Guadalupe arrived.

Rosa was happy to be back. "I was getting bored with that old village, and I want to see Sara"—a playmate.

Guadalupe brought news. Bobo had vanished again. "He took his precious trombone with him."

One day Guadalupe remarked—she was bending over some sewing—"Ignacio is a nice person, isn't he, Esperanza?"

Esperanza looked at her sharply. "He's a very fine person."

This time Guadalupe was unusually eager to get back to Milpa Verde. "I must see Tadeo," was her excuse. She left soon.

Esperanza suspected the real motive was Ignacio.

Now that Rosa was with her—the child was always so sunny and imaginative—Esperanza was quite content with the city. David liked Rosa tremendously and did an excellent portrait of her.

"He's just my caliber," said Rosa emphatically about David, in a vocabulary which surprised Esperanza.

Esperanza finally consented to let David paint her bust in the nude provided he would admit no one else.

Taking the platform, she trembled violently.

David was busy cleaning some brushes, his back to her.

Telling herself she was as ridiculous as a child, Esperanza slipped her dress down from her shoulders.

He went to work quietly. But his face glowed with satisfaction.

During her first rest period, he waxed lyrical. "You are more marvelous than I even imagined. Such arms, lovely and round and firm!"

She smiled. "Years at the grinding stone and the loom."

"And such shoulders! Such breasts! They are the breasts of a mother and of a virgin, too. They are the symbol of the fertility of your race. I hope I can get all that into my picture. I'm glad the bullet hardly left a scar."

When Esperanza took her place again, she could not help casting glances at herself. The lines were good, and she was glad because she wanted to help David, something akin to her feeling that day when she had bathed so happily with Matilda in the Huitzo. Since then, she had not thought of her body much, mostly had tried to forget it.

David told her he was giving a posada, a pre-Christmas party in the studio. Would she help with the punch and sandwiches and so on? "Are there any friends you would like to invite?" he asked.

She thought of Dr. Chávez and of Marta and Toño, but didn't know how the latter two were now getting on with each other.

"By all means let's invite them!" cried David. "The studio is big enough for both of them."

Esperanza and David worked all afternoon getting things ready. She cleaned up the whole studio, something she had ached to do

for a long time, and squeezed dozens and dozens of oranges and lemons. Big loads of dishes came from the homes of friends.

There was a *piñata*, a papier mache figure in the shape of one of the magical kings, which they filled with peanuts, oranges, apples, sugarcane, stick-candy, nuts. An Indian helper put a screw hook into the ceiling from which to hang it. A long rope permitted it to be jerked up and down. There would be fun breaking it.

Esperanza now wished she had her China Poblana costume. She could not resist the temptation of buying a pretty low-cut party dress, black silk with red trimmings, the most elegant attire she had ever owned, and high-heeled satin party slippers.

About forty odd people showed up, mostly writers, artists, newspaper men. At first Esperanza felt self-conscious and inferior, but both David and Elenor were so attentive to her, the other artists, too, that soon she was at ease, even more so when Marta, and then Toño, showed up.

There were many different types, from pure Indian to pure white Castillian. Lida, the little German-Mexican painter, with the twisted back, affected an Indian costume with long peasant skirts and rebozo—very cute, but stagey. Fernando was there, stumping around, glaring fiercely. He brought Esperanza a glass of punch and said he wanted her to pose again.

In fact, everybody was interested in Esperanza if for no other reason than that she was David's new model about whom he raved. All flattered her. How did she like it? Did she pose in the nude? Several artists promised to call on her services.

David pointed out a burly fellow, with close-cropped hair and frog-like body, heavy flattish features, beady eyes, big knobby nose and almost negroid lips. "That's Clemente Vidaurra, just back from Europe. He has a great reputation. He's going to marry the tall, wild-looking girl over there, Refugio de la Mar—'Cuca' they call her."

The girl in question was a long, rangy woman with a tangle of cloud-like black hair tumbling into her gleaming eyes. She looked quite untamed.

"And that's the great Diego Rivera," said David, almost worshipfully, pointing to a man who loomed up like a mountain. "And that's Frances Toor, editor of *Mexican Folkways*—the one over there with the glasses and the friendly expression. And

there's Howard Phillips, editor of *Mexican Life*. He looks quite distinguished, doesn't he?"

A curly headed American Jewish writer, Lawrence Wilder, was interested in Tarma Tancredo, daughter of a former cabinet minister. She was a round, lively girl with very thick-lensed glasses, not pretty but with a beaming personality, made piquant by quick biting wit. Her sloping brow gave her head an almost serpent-like effect, as though she were about to dart at one.

"The bushy-haired man with the thin sallow face and jerky manners," remarked Elenor in Esperanza's other ear, "is Primo Dufoo, the famous caricaturist on *El Mercurio*. He's a hop-head, uses cocaine—that's why he's so thin and waxy."

"And that beautiful blonde!" exclaimed Esperanza.

A big stunning woman in a very low-cut white dress swished by.

"Chabela Graña. She's a drug-store blonde, but she *is* beautiful," breathed Elenor, admiringly and enviously. "Two duels have been fought over her. Though she comes from a very wealthy family, she was the mistress of the last Minister of Education—everybody knows it. They say she's going to marry Esperón, the violinist."

She pointed to a tall, dapper fellow in pin stripe trousers and cutaway, who looked as though he were about to bow to a chamber-music audience.

"By the way," continued Elenor, "I saw the oil David is doing of your bust—quite the best thing he has ever painted. You inspire him very much. He's crazy to paint you in the nude."

She lit a cigarette, glancing at Esperanza with covert amusement.

"I wouldn't do that," said Esperanza shortly.

"And why not?" demanded Elenor. "There's nothing to it. Painters get a great inspiration from the right model. I wish I could have the effect you do on the old bear. You could make him famous."

"I'd like to do that," said Esperanza.

"You'd be doing him the greatest service of his whole life. I'd be glad to come and stay with you."

Esperanza remained silent.

The party was going hilariously. At one end, couples were dancing to phonograph music. Groups chatted animatedly, sipping punch.

Marta and Toño were getting along jollily. Marta came over to her.

"What a lovely dress!" she exclaimed. "And you, Esperanza, how you have changed! You have blossomed out into something new and charming! Like a butterfly out of its chrysalis. You are simply glowing. And all these fine friends! It must be a new world for you. It is for me. So many famous people I've heard about. It was nice of you to invite me."

"You look lovely yourself," replied Esperanza.

Marta was dressed in a dove-gray evening gown with a gardenia corsage. Her skin was so white, her hair so dark and majestically massed high on her head, her eyes so big and black and languorous. She always emanated a melting ripeness, like some very luscious tropic fruit. Along with the blonde, she was by all odds the most handsome woman present.

David came up. "You are quite impressive," he said to Marta. "Will you let me paint you in this dress?"

Marta flushed with pleasure. Esperanza felt jealous.

Toño approached and put his arm about Marta's shoulder. "She's a dream, isn't she?" he asked Esperanza.

Marta slapped his hand, but smiled at him fondly.

"I'll say she is," broke in an unexpected voice.

Dr. Chávez had come up. He had grown more hale and hearty. "This is a very pleasant surprise," he told Marta. "I haven't seen you for a long, long time, but you look more beautiful than ever."

Marta curtsied.

"As for Esperanza here," continued the doctor, "she's coming up in the world so fast that I'll have to begin charging her bigger fees for my services. She's too healthy, though, ever to need me. Did you ever see such a blooming countenance?"

There was a buzzing around the table, sagging with food, sandwiches, tacos, cold meats.

Esperanza found herself in a group hotly discussing the new agrarian reforms. David came up and added his work. How easily he dominated those about him!

He asked Esperanza to relate incidents in Milpa Verde when she was shot. Presently he introduced Caraveo de la Valle, an exiled Cuban student leader, quite a romantic figure, who after considerable Odyssey through Latin America had landed in Mexico. Handsome, tall, heavily built, an intense, fluent talker,

he had a very engaging personality and told Esperanza the story of Hatüey, the Indian martyr of Cuba, who preferred to burn at the stake rather than become a Christian and go to Heaven where he might meet more Spaniards.

Presently Caraveo drifted off to talk to wild Cuca, to whom he had evidently taken something of a real shine, much to the jealousy of Clemente.

Cuca tossed her head arrogantly to show her disdain of Clemente and flirted openly with the Cuban.

Clemente strode about, ill at ease, several times gave a significant yank to his cartridge belt, in very bad taste at a friendly party.

Presently Esperanza found herself talking to a strange girl with greenish eyes, accentuated by daubs of green paint. Machacuate, as she was known, was said to be the mistress of famous bearded Doctor Azteca—so he called himself—not then at the party, to whom she referred with a sarcastic leer, as “El Chivo Viejo”—the Old Goat.

Very jealous of Machacuate’s present flirting with Maurice was Lorraine Schwartz, an American Jewess with an enormous Hebraic nose and a big shock of coarse red-brown hair. She was keeping Maurice steady company, and he was helping her write a book on Mexican fiestas.

A little later, Esperanza found herself in a group talking literature—Gide, Proust, Eugene O’Neill, Mencken, and other strange names eddied back and forth.

A tall, red-headed man, with flesh like squashed tomatoes, was holding forth. He was a typical poet-politician employed in the Foreign Relations Department. His hair, smooth and flat in front, fell in separate strands behind. His pale blue eyes bulged and glared as he talked passionately of the psychosis of Gide.

Esperanza felt abysmally ignorant, but kept her ears open, trying to learn. It all sounded unreal, empty.

She closed her eyes and thought of Milpa Verde and the corn-fields and wondered how people got so wrought up about words on paper.

Her eyes closed thus, she found she was a bit dizzy from the punch. But her body felt warm and amorous.

A humorous diversion was made by Julia Patterson, an American woman with wavy blond hair, who ran a curio shop on Madero street, where the artists frequently exhibited. About

thirty-five, she had a good figure, but otherwise was plain, with big horn-rimmed spectacles, a little pug nose and bulging lips. But everybody liked her immensely. She was jolly and open.

Toño played the guitar and sang ranchero songs. Everybody joined in stentoriously.

The hour for breaking the piñata came. A victim was chosen—Tirso Bardo, a Hondureñan newspaper man from *Excelsior*, a leading daily. He gave a sniggering laugh while his eyes were bandaged over. A pole was thrust into his hand; he was turned round and round, then was pushed forward.

He zigzagged here and there, stopped and listened to orient himself, then walked straight toward the group where Esperanza was standing and suddenly gave a vicious swipe with the pole.

Everybody ducked just in time, roaring with laughter.

He turned back to the center, made several wild swings and once surely would have hit the piñata, if David, manipulating the rope, had not yanked it high in the air.

Tirso was declared incompetent. The bandage was next tied on Chabela, the tall blonde in white. The men all liked this because her luxuriant Junoesque figure excited them.

She, too, was unsuccessful; so were several others.

A shout went up that big Clemente Vidaurra have a try.

He was shoved forward.

Cuca, the wild girl, still flirting with Caraveo de la Valle, shouted insulting remarks at him.

He leaned his head way back so he could see along his nose from under the handkerchief.

"No fair! No fair!" shouted everyone.

Dropping the pole, he yanked out his pistol and peppered the piñata with bullets.

Directly across the room were David, Lawrence Wilder and Tarma Tancredo. Lawrence and Tarma dropped on their stomachs.

Esperanza screamed, "David!" and rushed over.

The piñata well perforated, Clemente yanked off the bandage and stuck his smoking pistol back.

Cuca hissed, "Idiot!"

He grinned with satisfaction as Wilder and Tarma got up, white around the gills, and Tarma upbraided him furiously.

David patted Esperanza kindly on the arm, though she knew he must be secretly angry.

"Just exhibitionism," he remarked. "Clemente is merely announcing to Caraveo that he had better leave his girl alone."

With a few jerks, the contents of the piñata were spilled out. The fruit, nuts and candies rattled on the floor and rolled.

Every one dived to get his share—a laughing, pawing, scrambling mob. Every one tripped and tumbled over everybody else, bumping heads and noses, all in mad confusion.

Everybody was roaring and shouting. The party was getting wild. People began pelting each other with oranges. More screams and laughter.

One woman lost her temper and told a little poet he was a shrimp.

Suddenly an orange smashed a terra cotta statuette that David prized very highly.

This sobered everybody for a moment. People whispered that Clemente had thrown it—maliciously.

"I wish we could take Cuca home," said David, "then things would be safe around here."

He got up on a chair to make a humorous, calming speech.

Somebody yanked the chair. He spilled over amid more laughter.

Esperanza, frightened lest he be hurt, helped him to his feet.

He patted her cheek, thanking her.

She flushed with embarrassment and pleasure.

Gradually the uproar died down. The phonograph was set going again. Couples danced. Another group started singing *Rancho Grande*. Esperanza joined in.

After about two o'clock the party dwindled, but many stayed on.

The party finally broke up at dawn. David requested Labastida to take Esperanza, Elenor, Julia Patterson, and two other girls to their respective homes.

Esperanza's head was in a whirl from it all.

She was thinking of what Elenor had said—that David wanted to paint her in the nude.

L

The painters and writers formed a syndicate and published a vivid sheet called *The Struggle*. Across the top was a machete, the peasant's long work knife. The paper, copiously illustrated,

fought for art for the masses and the rights of the workers and peasants.

David declared that models should belong. Esperanza and Elenor were commandeered. They sat in the meetings, listening to much eloquence. Esperanza helped in the office, wrote addresses, etc.

But these well-meaning artists and writers, to her, seemed far removed from the real world of struggle. David, though, when he toiled over his easel, brush in hand, seemed almost like a peasant, his strong fingers curled firmly but tenderly about the roots of a plant. But what grew was a picture, not something to eat.

In Milpa Verde one could really see the fight. If you didn't have land, you and your family starved and went in rags.

She broached her perplexity to David.

"The peasants have saints on their walls, don't they?" he countered. "You weave beautiful cloth and embroider it. The Indians make pottery not only to use, but with lines and designs they consider beautiful. We want our pictures to replace the saints and sweep away the false art of the Church, and of the painters who have corrupted their talents for the wealthy and who are motivated by commercialism and foreign fads. We won't paint any more baskets of fruit and posies for aristocratic dining-rooms. We will put the hammers of the factory and the machetes of the fields into our canvases.

"Art, dear Esperanza, is as much the rightful food of man as beans and corn. He cannot live without it, and no matter how poor and bestialized or how wealthy and bestialized, never does.

"We want to discover the real Mexico and help build a greater Mexico. We must paint the Indian and his life. The Indian is Mexico. The base of it, the essence of it, the rhythm of it, the eternal persistent reality of it."

"Then," argued Esperanza, "you painters should live in the villages, like the people you paint, not shut up in Mexico City studios."

"I will go with you to Milpa Verde!" cried David. "I will refresh myself at the source.

"But I do know of the sufferings of my people. I was brought up on a ranch near a big hacienda which kept my father fighting every day of the year to survive. I saw how peasants on the big estates were treated. As a boy I felt their sorrows.

"Once I interfered when a peasant friend was flogged. I had to run away.

"I worked in Jalisco, in a mine, on the edge of a volcano, a mine nearly a mile deep, where hot springs flow, at a temperature of over a hundred degrees, a veritable hell. Six months I worked. Then the revolution came.

"I fought in the revolution—as a soldier, then as a sergeant, finally as a captain. Here"—he tore open his shirt and showed her a scar on his powerful chest. "I, too, have been wounded. That bullet went within a quarter of an inch of my heart."

Esperanza was all commiseration.

"But when did you learn to paint?" she asked.

He waved a brush. "I've always painted. I used to paint scenes on tin for the peasants, later the miners, to hang in the churches when they escaped sickness or injury, apparently by a miracle. It is the painting the people know all over the land—simple and strong.

"But, now, I don't want to paint pictures for people to hang in churches, but in their homes. The Church has built beautiful temples, but it has never taught our people to build even decent homes. It has absorbed all their art, leaving their homes barren of art. We want to restore these things to the people."

He strode to and fro. "After I came to Mexico City, I studied at the San Carlos Academy for two years and painted and painted. An exhibition got good publicity. I sold a few things. Now I teach in the art school every night. Occasionally I sell a canvas. I draw for the magazines. I manage."

One morning he was wild with excitement. "At last we have our chance," he cried, dancing around. "The government has given us the walls of the Economic Institute to paint: Ignacio, Fernando, Clemente and myself."

She asked him what he intended to paint.

"An epic of the Mexican people, the days of the pyramids, the Conquest, the long slavery and the emancipation, the Indians receiving lands, the villages free, and you, lovely Esperanza, you will be my inspiration. Your body is strong and beautiful, the very symbol of vitality.

"You must pose for me nude, Esperanza. If you can't I can't do anything. This is the opportunity I have long dreamed of."

He swept her on the current of his enthusiasm. If he felt that

her body was essential to his success, why begrudge it? She was not a silly young girl.

She took off her clothes and put herself in the pose he indicated.

"My God!" he cried, rushing up and down the studio. "Stupendous. I will paint such frescoes as were never painted before!"

She glowed with inward satisfaction that he was so pleased.

He set to work like a madman on great sheets of yellow paper. He sketched and sketched her, life-size, filling in sheet after sheet with lightning strokes, making her change her pose time and again.

His enthusiasm continued unabated during the days that followed. He worked like a crazy dervish.

Esperanza became quite as nonchalant as Elenor, indeed now that her false modesty was removed, felt a pleasing freedom.

She became more interested in her own body. Elenor had meticulously cared for her toe-nails. Esperanza did the same. She bought pretty silk and lace lingerie, things she had never owned. How nice the soft silk felt! Passing a drug store window, she noticed a cold-cream advertisement. She bought it and read the directions carefully.

She bought powder and rouge and a hair lotion. She bathed carefully every day.

One day David moved her leg to arrange her pose.

"This way," he said brusquely, and darted back to his easel.

Despite his utter indifference to her at that moment as a person, her skin, where he had touched her burned like fire. The blood flooded through her body and rose in waves to her neck and cheeks. Her very stomach seemed to dissolve. Her breath came in short gasps. Her breasts heaved.

"Good God!" he shouted. "What a marvelous expression you had on your face just then! If only I can remember it!"

He yanked down his sheet of paper and drew her face madly.

"Your whole body has a different texture and color."

The fire and fury of his creative effort fused her through and through. She really seemed part of some majestic enterprise, and her body, vibrant with response out of sympathy for his efforts, sent out magnetic waves to his brush, his paper, his canvas, his hands, his brain.

But she acquired an inner resentment that he saw her only as a model, not as a body with heart and brain, not as a woman. The eternal feminine instinct awoke in her, so that when she took off her clothes, or rested, or dressed, she was more ostentatious,

trying to make him really notice that the body he painted was of warm flesh and blood, not merely mass, lines, light and shade, and color.

If he noticed, he gave no sign. He thought of her body as a work of art by nature, he schemed about it, planned with it, thought of it in new combinations. Day and night he was at work, if not at his easel, in his mind, shaping his epic fresco.

Besides an enormous upper wall, he also had the stair-case, three stories of it. His project would start from the warm blue waves and calm pale sky of the Caribbean, at one side a storm brewing. There would lie the lazy port of Vera Cruz, seen from above, with its even squares of flat-roofed houses, its maritime movements, its gardens. The spiral of the painting would ascend, then, from the lush tropic lowlands to the sear lower mountains, then past the frozen volcanoes to the upland valley of Mexico, its great reach of low volcanic cones, its rim of lofty peaks, its great checkerboard of green and brown and purple tones, its lakes.

In the lowlands, the lash would be at the backs of the peasants; men would be driven to toil in the mines. In the upper reach he would achieve his ideal—the three-forked lightning striking the fratricidal sword from the hand of the murderous exploiter, striking down greedy priest and general and landlord. There would stand the worker, peasant and soldier, clasping hands in true fraternity.

There, peasants would be receiving and cultivating lands, workers in a model factory, their children in school. The tractor would be humming, the factory working, an aeroplane swooping down with a message of peace.

It would be a painting of the past, the present, the future; it would be a painting portraying the progress of the human mind and spirit, achieving the utopia where mankind, nature and the machine live in harmony—a new trilogy, David called it, “not based on superstitions or dark myths used to befuddle and rob people.”

And so he sketched and painted and swore and shouted pæans of joy and sweated and raged.

Esperanza felt herself completely part of his titanic effort, as though she were helping re-create the universe itself.

One afternoon he came over to her, turned her head slightly, moved her arm against her breast.

His face was transfused with the glow of his work. He was so exalted, so intent, so terrible, so full of fire, she could not help feeling this pulse through her, and she trembled with sheer admiration.

The slight tremor that ran through her body jerked him up short.

He looked at her curiously—in a new way.

She lay there, watching him admiringly, her lips slightly parted, eager with his eagerness.

It was he who trembled now. His whole face changed. He suddenly saw her as a woman, young, beautiful and desirable, and at this particular moment, sensuous and receptive.

The passionate concentration that had existed for his easel was suddenly transferred to her.

Putting his arms around her bare shoulders, he leaned over and kissed her.

She gasped and closed her eyes happily.

"David!" she murmured. "Kiss me again."

He caught her to him, kissed her passionately.

She returned his kisses, full-mouthed and eager.

With his first kiss he had conquered her forever.

He kissed her mouth, her face, her neck. She had never felt such kisses before. Nothing in Luis' half-peasant love-making had been like this.

She received gladly, thinking only of the ethereal joy of the moment.

They lay in each other's arms happily and excitedly the rest of the afternoon, until dusk folded over the studio and night came, and he had to get up to go to his lessons.

They did not talk about their experience. Both merely accepted.

He continued to work, drawing her in the mornings as furiously as ever.

In the afternoons, they gave themselves over to their passion, happily, almost like two children.

But in her joy was also the inherent sadness of her race, tempering her love, giving it expression, depth, meaning, eternal wisdom.

He had discovered in her, not merely her beautiful eager body, but a comradeship he had known in no other woman.

All his life he had sharply separated the two things. He had taken women merely as a quick, sensual necessity—Elenor for instance. Elenor was infatuated with him, but it scarcely mattered

to him. In his paintings of her, he brutally exaggerated her vapid sensualism. Not quite fair, for if shallow, she did have a certain cleverness.

Everything was so different with this peasant woman from the hills.

But as the days went on he had more and more trouble with his painting. He couldn't get started. Dissatisfied with what he did, angrily he would tear up sheet after sheet.

His singleness of purpose had been bent. He had become a man divided. His previous concentration, his smashing drive, were gone. The novelty of possessing Esperanza kept his thoughts going forward to their moments of physical pleasure.

Distraught, irritable, several times he spoke sternly.

"God!" he cried angrily one morning, hurling his brush to the floor. "Why can't I get what I want? It won't come." He sat down, head in his hands.

Esperanza slipped her bare feet into a pair of slippers and came over to him and stroked his hair.

"I'm sorry, David. I wanted so to help you in every way. I would lay down my life to do that."

"I know," he said petulantly. "But nothing comes right. I'm stuck. And the time is getting short. And this is the chance of a lifetime."

"If—if I'm a hindrance, I'll go away, David."

"No, no." He pulled her to him and began kissing her violently. "I'm mad about you, simply mad about you. But it seems I can't be mad about two things at once."

For the first time, she tried to restrain his passion, to push him away.

This merely excited him more. Almost brutally, he carried her over to the couch.

In his fury and excitement, he was strong and magnificent. She felt as though she had been shaken by a tempest.

He forgot all about his painting that morning, and, of course, did nothing in the afternoon.

The next morning, he was still more sullen. He worked away, but his face was drawn. It was no use. He knew it.

Gloomily he cleaned his palette.

She dressed. "I understand, David. It would be better if I didn't come for a while."

He whirled about with a snarl. "You've got to come! By God,

you've got to come! And by God, I'll make a go of this! It will come! It will!"

He banged the table and the paint tubes danced.

LI

Little by little, David grew calmer, worked better.

One morning, he threw down his brush and came over beside her and ran his hand tenderly down her body.

She lay there, smiling up at him tenderly.

"How I know this line!" he said quietly. "I have painted it a thousand times now. My fingers have caressed it. It is part of me. It flows through me like water. It works out through every pattern I make. It goes through every theme I try. It runs like a golden thread through all the frescoes."

He had never been just like this before, and she waited expectantly.

"I've found myself again, Esperanza. Now that we have come together this way, I see a thousand new things in you, a thousand subtleties and beauties I would never have known otherwise, a thousand forces I did not comprehend. Your body is more potent, even more of a symbol. It is richer than ever to me, and it is making my painting richer."

She smiled happily and stroked his face.

"For a time," he went on, "though I would not admit it to myself, I was divided. And the new things I was learning about you threw all I had done out of focus."

She nodded. "I knew it. It made me very sad."

He caressed her again. "I'm whole again. Everything is as before and better. You and myself and my work are now all harmonious parts of a whole. We are both projecting ourselves there, not merely my taking something from you and transferring it. My work is flowing directly out from our love, a direct thing, not a borrowing. Now it is really fused, complete. It is stronger than before, stronger than I had ever imagined it could be."

She was thrilled. This was the first time he had ever used the word "love."

From this time on, he worked calmly, surely.

"How foolish was my impatience!" he remarked. "How foolish I was to think for a single moment that my relation with you was hindering me? How could I really have hoped to have made a trinity of man with his environment without having the fertiliz-

ing urge functioning properly in myself and myself attuned similarly in every way?"

He reorganized the whole plan of his frescoes more thoroughly and organically.

Soon he began painting at the Institute.

Day after day the frescoes spread over the walls. Esperanza was the female motif. In a golden blaze, she walked the waves of the rippled Caribbean, her hair floating loose behind her; her firm hands guided the ships before the gale at Vera Cruz, and the waves creamed up and caressed her breasts; in purple and red, she walked, basket on her head, through the tropical forests; she lolled in a hammock at the coolish close of the day in the hot country on a porch of a blue ranch house; she knelt nude in a riot of bright-colored flowers and pulpy leaves before the ancient God of Flowers, with his necklace of human bones; she whirled, a goddess in the clouds of the thunder shower over the vast panorama of the Valley of Mexico; she was sitting in the fields, teaching children and old folk their letters; cartridge belt criss-crossed over her full bosom, rifle in hand, she guarded the trenches of the revolution.

Once she remarked, "When you finish your frescoes, you won't need me any longer."

He looked at her reproachfully. "That remark is unworthy of you."

His reply increased her happiness. She did not want ever to leave him. Her whole being had been stimulated, her life widened and enriched.

He finally suggested they take an apartment together.

They found a pleasant place on the third floor of an old building on the Plaza Santo Domingo. Their balcony windows overlooked the little grass square, with its old trees, its bronze statue, whitened with the droppings of birds. In front on the avenue were reddish tezontle colonial buildings. Esperanza was wild with happiness.

She gave up her posing with other artists, and David got her a small job at the Museum in the Bureau of Indigenous Arts. She liked the work.

Often she saw Dr. Chávez there, who, when free from his practice, was always delving into his hobby, his ethnological studies. They became quite well acquainted. She often helped him put his hand on the materials he was seeking.

A studious, earnest fellow, he was genial and humorously philosophical.

Lola Tabor, the lively, little coquettish secretary of the director of the museum, got quite a case on Chávez. But if he often talked lengthily to Esperanza, particularly about Milpa Verde, he never paid much attention to Lola, though she was plump, comely and devilish.

But Dr. Chávez seemed to attract her more than any one else. And the more he ignored her, the more she flew into a queer pique. Lola, though, just couldn't help setting her cap for every good-looking man, and she arched up to David whenever he happened in at the Museum.

He rather liked her, much to Esperanza's irritation.

Several times David found Esperanza talking very seriously to Dr. Chávez, and Esperanza could see that it made him jealous.

She guessed that one just couldn't be in love without having too great a possessive feeling.

One day Esperanza learned that a job as check-room girl was going to be open.

She rushed to hunt up Matilda, still drudging away in a factory. She loaned her a nice dress and got the director to agree to see her.

"She's not good-looking at all," Esperanza warned him.

"So much the better for that job," he replied. "Good Lord, Lola Tabor is about all the good looks I can stand around here—besides those you have, of course."

Matilda got the job. She got twice as much as at the factory and the hours were short.

Matilda was very grateful and spent most of her first week's wages for a vanity case for Esperanza.

Esperanza was touched, but scolded her roundly.

Matilda now looked up to Esperanza in complete awe and worshipped the ground she trod.

"You got me a job once," Esperanza reminded her several times.

She learned that Nora had studied at night school and now had a fairly good position in the office of the big department store, Palacio de Hierro.

Esperanza and David were increasingly happy together.

She now read and studied a lot. Then, as twilight fell, she loved to watch the people in the square below their apartment; the lov-

ing couples, several old men, a fat Spaniard with a black *boina*, numerous bootblacks. At the colored-glass ice cream kiosk, other couples were seated on little white wooden stools. On the opposite side of the square, the ancient massive Inquisition building stood as a symbol of Mexico's long centuries of blood. A white plaque with eagle, serpent and cactus, reminded those few who chanced to glance up that here also was the spot where the Aztec God of War, Huitzilopochtli, had given the ancient people the sign to found this city on this spot over six hundred years ago. It all linked up in Esperanza's mind with the stone idol in the Big House and with the slavery and superstition being slowly lifted from the land.

Now, along the street that once was a waterway and swamp, buzzed auto cars and busses. When Esperanza had first come to the city, this street had been rough cobbles over which jolted leisurely victorias; coachmen cracking their whips bravely over bony nags that would soon go their way to be gored in the bullring. Now Mexico City, despite the revolution or because of it, was a vast metropolis of nearly a million inhabitants and still growing fast.

Often she and David went down to a little cubby-hole café on the República de Cuba street, run by a brother of Clemente Orozco's, known as Los Monotes, the Café of Cartoons, because of the Rabelaisian cut-out cardboard caricatures, made by the various artists, which lined the wall—a frieze of sniffing dogs, a cockfight, a toreador, matrimonial quarrels, several nudish figures of the chorus girls from the Lirico Theatre across the way, a row of Trolls running off with a banker, a politician, a priest and other unsavory specimens of the moribund bourgeoisie.

Here in this little place of stalls and wooden tables and narrow wall benches, where food was cheap, she constantly met quite a group of artists, writers and others, always jolly and boisterous, a Bohemian crowd.

Now and then Clemente came with Cuca, whom he had finally married. Esperanza now saw in her only an arrogant, caustic type, in whom capriciousness and the flash of phosphorescent eyes and her wildly uncombed hair were mistaken for intelligence and originality.

One night in the café, Caraveo de la Valle, still attracted, was paying entirely too much attention to her.

Clemente sat with half-closed lids, his frog-like hands clenched in sullen fury.

Suddenly he arose with a yank of his cartridge belt and said harshly, "Come on home, Cuca."

She shot him a quick defiant glance; but after one look into his set face she arose obediently.

Later, Esperanza learned, they had quarrelled violently, which was habitual, but this time Clemente beat her up roundly under the first lamp post.

Now and then they met other well-known painters, such as David Siqueiros, Diego Rivera, and the one-armed Clemente Orozco.

A girl of whom Esperanza was very fond was Mercedes Riocci, a very beautiful Neapolitan who did commercial photography. With her fluffy hair over a low forehead she seemed to have stepped right out of a winsome portrait by Correggio. Caraveo liked her very much, too. Ultimately they became intimate friends.

Mercedes was a deep sensitive type. She had been married to a young American poet, who had died of typhoid in Mexico, then she had taken up photography to make a living. She did delicate, intuitive work.

Of the foreigners, next to Mercedes, Esperanza liked pug-nosed Julia Patterson, who had been slightly tipsy at the party. If direct and tactless, she had no false dignity or self-conceit, hated pretense and sham, and had a heart of gold. She would do anything for those she liked, and she was especially fond of David.

"Why don't you move in down where I live?" suggested Julia. "It's an old convent on Nuevo México street, remodelled into apartments. They are very cheap and the patios are lovely, sort of dilapidated and romantic."

David said they were comfortable where they were. Later perhaps.

David's frescoes were the topic of conversation.

They had aroused controversy everywhere, among the artists for their new technique and boldness, among everybody for their satire on well-known figures. For David had chopped off quite a few political heads in his painting, among them a cabinet minister's and Rufo's.

Rufo had gone ahead with his National Association of Workers

and Peasants—next to the Regional Confederation of Labor led by Luis N. Morones—the strongest group of its kind in the country. The Association now published an afternoon daily, *El Progreso*.

David felt that in good part the Association was merely, with its actual leadership, little more than a political ruse to delude the masses and bring greater glory and might to Rufo.

Certainly Rufo was building up great influence, was close to the government, and was becoming a real power in the land. Getting wealthy rapidly, he had built himself a handsome residence in the Colonia del Valle, which soon became famous for its hilarious parties to which no mere wife was ever invited.

David put Rufo into one of the panels at the Institute as a Janus-faced hypocrite. One half of Rufo was dressed in overalls, and with eloquent contorted features he was haranguing a multitude of workers and peasants; the other half of him was dressed up in evening clothes, diamonds on his hands and holding a glass of champagne, as he talked with politicians and generals and cocottes in a gay party.

At once *El Progreso* attacked David viciously and kept it up day after day. Without mentioning Rufo, the paper called attention to various political heresies in his painting, his lampooning of high dignitaries, including the cabinet minister, and of various over-touted intellectuals. It damned the painting technically and every other way. It printed a distorted version of David's studio party, making it out an orgy of naked shame, and it did not hesitate to print lie after lie about his private life. The controversy spilled over into the other papers.

Esperanza was worried about it, but David laughed it off and said the publicity was all to the good for all Mexico City was now talking about him.

She thought he ought to reply to the more damaging accusations.

"Not yet, not yet. Patience," was his answer. "Let them spill themselves out and lather all over the mouth, then when they get tired, I'll get in my jabs and have the last word. There's always a psychological moment to get the best results. First of all, I want to finish the fresco—that itself will be one reply to everything."

"But Rufo is a dangerous man," she warned him. "He is resentful and vengeful. He has power and he won't stop at anything."

"He's on the spot now and will be increasingly so. Come, let's go down to the vegetarian restaurant."

This restaurant, run by a big bearded German, was on the second floor of the Cable Building, and they often went there on account of Caraveo and Mercedes, for Caraveo was mostly a vegetarian. The place, ever full, not only of vegetarians but all sorts of exaggerated food cranks, always amused Esperanza.

On this occasion, they ran into Tirso Bard and several other newspaper men.

Tirso, in that nervous jerky way of his, praised David for his courage in lampooning well-known figures who needed lampooning. But one of the others shook his head.

"You may get into trouble. That Rufo—he's not to be trifled with. Watch your step."

Another day at the vegetarian restaurant, they were surprised to see Marta and Toño.

They rushed over cordially.

To David, Toño said: "I'm surely glad to see you again. I think you are a great artist, though not exactly to my taste. You moderns—" and they plunged into a long argument, for Toño was now writing art criticisms for one of the local dailies. He, too, warned David of the danger of attacking Rufo.

To Esperanza, Marta remarked, in a peculiarly defensive fashion: "Toño and I drop in here sometimes."

So, Marta had at last become interested in Toño in a slightly more than cousinly manner.

"Toño gets fads, you know," said Marta. "Just now he argues vehemently that all meat is rank poison and insists on eating hay. He'll get over it."

She looked Esperanza over. "You're looking splendid. And such a chic little dress! You are simply blooming!"

Esperanza asked her about Caldwell.

Marta was reticent. "Oh, he's all right. I never see him any more."

"And your mother?"

"Oh, didn't you know, she died —"

"I'm sorry —"

Marta herself appeared more alert and sophisticated in a new way, but Toño seemed more nondescript, his cheeks pudgy, a suggestion of paunch that threw his whole body out of proportion.

He had been thrown cityward for good and was now a typical Mexico City dilettante of the better classes with a little money.

"By the way!" he cried, "I'm taking care of Bobo now."

"Really!" exclaimed Esperanza. "I'm so glad!"

"I fitted up a place for him in the garage. He's a wise little idiot. Some strange intuition about things. He's playing in a band somewhere."

David and Esperanza, after that, saw a good deal of Toño and Marta, who now went everywhere together.

Several times David and Esperanza went to Toño's house, a colossal family mansion in Colonial style. Toño wanted David's opinion on his collection of paintings.

"A few good things," David told him, and pointed them out, but severely criticized most of the things Toño thought were the best.

They saw Bobo, which made Esperanza happy.

His body had grown lumpier, but his face was more weazened.

He played the trombone for her, and to her surprise, very well.

"And what are you up to now?" she asked.

"The weeds are all grown up again," he said. "We shall have to get out our sharp knives and cut them down. It will be a bloody sight."

"Do you like Toño?"

Bobo wrinkled up his nose. "He's a harmless weed with an occasional sweet odor."

"And Marta?"

"A sweet body with a sweet soul."

"And Esperanza?"

His eyes brightened. "When the gods molded clay they worked long before they could make a beautiful pot which would also be useful. You are a fine pot for homemade fires."

"And Bobo?"

He danced up and down and knotted his hands. "He is a maguey plant. And a maguey plant—there you have our dear Mexico. Think about it."

Esperanza got Marta, who needed work badly, a good job at the museum.

The director threw up his hands. "That Matilda you brought around here is the homeliest thing this side the Styx. She's an old shoe. So I guess we can stand one more beauty around the

place. Your friend is stunning. She's not just a sizzling frying pan like Lola."

Now Lola Tabor, to her disgust had a real rival for Dr. Chávez' attention, for soon he showed a deep interest in Marta.

Once Esperanza ran into Chávez and Marta coming out of a movie.

Marta blushed.

Esperanza was happy about it. She hoped they might fall in love. She wondered, though, about Toño.

One morning she saw him in a big mob before a bank—Caldwell's bank.

Angry shouts were going up. The police moved restlessly on the fringe. The institution had closed its doors.

She asked Toño what the matter was.

"It's busted. Fortunately I had only a few hundred pesos in it, but a friend kept thirty thousand there, just because it was an American bank."

She asked about Marta.

His face clouded. "I'm not getting anywhere. Just when I thought I was surely getting the halter over her neck, she shied off. That Dr. Chávez has taken a shine to her."

He was so thoroughly miserable about it that Esperanza was sad.

She and David went to the Caldwells' to tell them how sorry they were about the bank catastrophe.

Caldwell greeted her effusively—a deaconish way of rolling and stretching his mouth.

"Well, well, you've become quite a person." He took note of her dress.

He did not seem alarmed or put out by the failure of his bank. "All in the game," he said, holding up his head like a smug oracle of prosperity.

When she introduced David, Caldwell remarked, "Muñoz—Muñoz—seems as though I've heard that name."

"Are you by any chance the painter?" asked Mrs. Caldwell.

"Of course!" boomed Caldwell. "She's been up to see your things. Says they are very queer, but remarkable, very remarkable. Unfortunately, I don't know a damned thing about art.

"But say," continued Caldwell, "I admire your guts in attacking Rufo. He needs it. I'd like to see that gorilla under the sod. He's a dangerous man."

Mrs. Caldwell was really quite thrilled to know David.

"And how is Ida?" asked Esperanza.

"She's going to school in the States. She'll be down for vacation next month. You must come around and see her. She'll want to see Rosa again I'm sure."

"Will you want some photos taken of her? A friend of mine, Mercedes Riocci, does quite remarkable work."

"When Ida gets here, bring your friend around, bring her around," boomed Caldwell.

A few weeks later, passing along Madero, Esperanza noticed that across the street from the closed Caldwell bank, a new bank, the Mexico City Trust Company, had opened up. Soon she learned that this was Caldwell's bank under a new name. But all the depositors in the old bank had lost everything. She began to guess why Caldwell had not been worried.

Julia Patterson, who knew the Caldwells because they came to her curio shop, said that Caldwell had brought about the collapse of the first bank to squeeze out his partners and was now in full charge of the new one. Esperanza was shocked.

Julia was worried about David. "He's wading in deep waters. That attack on Rufo—that means war to the death, and David had better fill up his ammunition chest or take out insurance. I'm afraid."

Rufo, it was soon evident, would not content himself with merely attacking David in *El Progreso*.

A prominent politician came to see David and suggested that the fresco with Rufo in it be changed. Rufo, he said, would then gladly let bygones be bygones.

David merely laughed, and said: "Go back to Rufo and tell him that I'll gladly change it. I'll paint him, instead, sitting on a toilet seat. Tell him to take his choice."

A few days later another emissary appeared. Rufo it seemed, had suddenly become very interested in the Painters and Writers Syndicate and wanted it and *The Struggle* to prosper. The Association was willing to contribute ten thousand pesos to the treasury of the organization. A check would be made out immediately to David.

David laughed again. "Tell Rufo that *The Struggle* really means 'struggle.'"

Rufo next brought pressure to bear on the government. The Minister of Education was brought into the rumpus.

David was called in, and it was rather forcibly hinted that he be more cautious and that the fresco of Rufo could well be altered.

David refused point blank. The Syndicate and *The Struggle* began an onslaught on the Minister.

He threatened to fire all the artists and erase the Institute frescoes.

David carried the matter to the President, a jovial dictator who enjoyed the cat-and-mouse game, and who preferred to see his subjects fighting each other rather than himself.

The outcome was that the artists got a free hand to paint whatever they wanted. Rufo was left biting his finger nails.

But presently several sinister-looking types appeared at the scaffolding where David was painting, to whisper to him that they had an inside tip that Rufo was going to get him.

But David still refused to be frightened.

LII

From Milpa Verde came news that Guadalupe and Ignacio had gotten married.

Shortly after, Esperanza made a short trip up.

Ignacio looked at Esperanza with a twinkle in his eyes. "The mat was vacant a long time."

Esperanza enjoyed seeing everybody. Poor Toña, her cousin, now about sixteen, had remained terribly disfigured with pockmarks. José and Adelita were prospering.

But she found José in a dour mood. "The village is having trouble getting its land grant confirmed. There's a big snag somewhere."

Two months later she went up again, this time with David. It was then in the full rainy season. The very roofs sagged with moisture.

She sensed trouble in the air as soon as they rode down from San Benito.

To her horror she learned that the villagers had been ordered off their lands—this just when the place was beginning to amount to something.

"It's Caldwell's bank," said José, bitterly. "Caldwell is a dirty double-crossing Gringo. He must have known all the time that he would never give the village its lands."

The mood of the villagers was ugly—trouble in the offing.

"Now," Esperanza told David, "you'll see what it's like, what the fight means in places like this."

Agitated sessions were held in José's house on an afternoon of low clouds and icy rains. Ignacio, Eduardo, even old Pablo, all were for putting up an armed fight. If they tamely left the lands on the date fixed, about a month hence, when their crops would just be maturing, there would be no chance. Bloodshed might make the government realize it had to take them into consideration.

Old feuds revived. The hacienda party, seeing which way the wind was blowing, and abetted by Father Mateo, had sprung back into active existence. Personal and family quarrels soon complicated the issue. Now this man and that man fell.

Esperanza was terribly worried for the safety of José and all his friends. Would they never get justice!

Despite the agitation and uncertainty, David—who had fallen in love with the twisted gray lanes, the quaint clumps of roofs, the people—did a great deal of painting; excellent portraits of old Alvaro, Arnulfo, Pablo, Petra and others. Later, in the city, he did a big canvas of the meeting in José's house.

The day they were to leave, Esperanza's former suitor, Eduardo, was shot down from ambush.

Esperanza and David stayed over for the funeral. That night, a wake, a very sober one, was held over his body, and at dawn, José, David, Ignacio and three other villagers, carried him out in the wan light to the cemetery.

The shadow of his death hung over them heavily as a warning of still more terrible things to come. Esperanza and David went back to the city saddened by the tragedy, and she still more worried about José and her friends.

Several months later, José unexpectedly appeared in Mexico City, his arm in a sling.

He had been shot. The soldiery had come in to move out the peasants from their lands. The soldiers had taken food by force and two girls had been raped. The officers slept in the curatage, guests of Father Mateo and his slink-eyed "niece."

José had gotten into a fracas, and he and half a dozen others had to take to the hills.

"As we rode through the lands we were losing," said José, "I saw old García hugging a big corn stalk and weeping. Several

peasants tried to destroy their crops so the hacienda wouldn't get the benefit of them, and one was killed by the soldiers."

José had ridden a roundabout way nearly half the distance to Mexico City, where he had sold his horse and come in by train. He didn't believe he would be arrested here in the city.

He was not very hopeful of anything. "By September the people will be so hungry they will have to emigrate or work on the hacienda for a pittance."

"And Adelita?"

"I had to leave the poor kid behind. I'll send for her as soon as I can get a footing here. She's a brave and wise woman, not so impulsive as I am."

Very bitter, he said that sooner or later, to accomplish anything, he would have to take to the field again in a new revolution.

He saw Rufo several times, and presently, to David's disgust, began working for the former's National Labor and Agrarian Association. David argued. Esperanza argued.

But if José didn't trust Rufo very far, he had a chance to work, and so for the next twelve months he was in and out of town, organizing.

Presently Rufo was elected Congressman from Pachuca. Almost immediately he leapt into the headlines.

Following an acrimonious debate on the floor, he and a colleague had rushed out to the marble hall of the Chamber of Deputies, had paced off the required dueling distance on the mezzanine, and then turning swiftly had emptied their revolvers at each other.

Shot through the belly, for weeks Rufo hovered between life and death. He finally got well.

José got David and Esperanza visitors' cards for the fourth annual convention of Rufo's Association in the Hidalgo Theatre.

There was a motley collection of Indians and mestizos, mostly dressed in white pajamas and big sombreros; but these bizarre men, however apart from city customs, could well be a power in their respective communities.

Rufo made a ringing address—he had become a marvelous orator—"we revolutionaires" and "land to the peasants."

"Smell them," said David, suddenly. "These people smell differently than a Mexico City audience. Their bodies smell of the earth, of corn and chile and pulque. It's a shame they're being

pulled around for cheap political purposes. I wonder how Rufo will get along with Luis Morones, the head of the Regional Confederation of Labor—the CROM? They are working in the same vineyard.”

On the basis of this mass support, Rufo was taking the hurdles well. He backed Calles for President and after the elections was put in charge of a fat government bureau with an enormous budget. He blossomed out more and more, soon was rolling in money and began to climb socially. He took on the sporting air of a typical Mexico City politician. He was a power now; the newspapers feared to attack him.

He met and wooed Josefina Cingüeros, a nineteen-year-old beauty of the wealthy Spanish set. Remembering his humble beginnings in the Pachuca cantina, he was duly proud of his conquest. The papers gave lengthy accounts of the elaborate costly wedding.

From his wife he soon moved on to costly mistresses. He built up a palatial retreat in Tacubaya suburb that cost half a million, where he installed a luxurious Turkish bath. Rumor had it that he staged wild orgies there, as in his previous home—all this in the space of several years.

With the association as basis, he boosted adherents in the inner clique of the organization, known as the “Palanca,” into velvet political jobs. José had finally gotten a remunerative position as head of the government printing plant.

Rufo also organized his famous “crow-bar gangs,” made up of thugs on the government payroll, who killed strike-breakers, smashed up hostile newspapers, beat up opposition candidates and stole ballot-boxes.

José swore he was not mixed up in such things, though it was from him Esperanza learned about them, and she was more and more worried lest Rufo use his thugs on David, though the controversy over the fresco had apparently subsided.

The frescoes were nearly finished now. David was also doing canvases.

Julia Patterson staged an exhibit for him that had a good press.

David and Esperanza finally moved down to the old convent where Julia lived. Their Santo Domingo place was a bit crowded when Rosa was home week-ends. Soon she would be entering preparatory school and would be home all the time.

Rosa, very lively and winning for her age, fourteen now, every day was more full of poise and cleverness.

A pleasant feature of living at the convent was that José and Adelita—she had come down permanently—lived only two blocks away. Adelita had taken to Mexico like a duck to water.

After they moved, they got to know Julia still better. Mercedes, Caraveo, the Cuban student leader, and one-legged Fernando—all came frequently to Julia's place, and less often, Clemente and wild Cuca, who now, to Clemente's great disgust was going to have a baby. Occasionally Dr. Chávez dropped in.

The convent itself, a rambling one-story structure with two large patios, they soon discovered to be a delightful place.

A long, tree-shaded corridor led through a cool vaulting to a crumbling stone fountain and red brick corral in the inner patio. Lacy shade patterns played over the brown stone walls; vines rambled over little trellises; bamboo cages were strung along the sides of doorways, a riot of flowers and song and peace.

Beyond the brick columns of the corral was a rear stone wall, half fallen, overrun with untrimmed vines, honey-suckle, morning-glory, ivy, geraniums and clambering roses. Tall eucalyptus and ash trees and several banana trees gave shade, and cut off the full sun from the inviting horseshoe doorways.

Esperanza enjoyed the rhythm of life in the patio, the early tradesmen chattering and joking with the servant girls, then the boys sweeping the patio, and finally, the front shutters open, the sun streaming in over the red-tiled floor—warm, satisfying. The stray conversations at neighboring house doors, the musical calls of the children and the venders.

Every afternoon, about three, the sky clouded over, thunder echoed above the roofs, the rain came driving down, blurring the soft brown of the walls. The long twisted gargoyles snorted, and great chutes of water sloshed into the patio.

She liked the patio best of all at night. The street zaguán closed at ten. They had to knock to be let in by the janitor.

He slept just inside the door on a mat on the stones. By day he strutted around in a smart double-breasted brown suit, dirty white waistcoat, spats and a little cane. His wife, a massive Indian woman, did all the hard work, cleaned, ran errands, washed clothes and beamed on the world, inordinately proud of her bantam husband.

Stepping inside the zaguán at night, Esperanza could see down

the long passage-way beneath the barrel-shaped vault, lit by a medieval lantern to the inner patio, the fountain and the corral, often bathed in fresh moonlight, hauntingly beautiful and peaceful. On clear nights, she often sat late in the open doorway, sometimes with David, and always singularly content.

More and more Esperanza felt her life to be growing richer. Every day her horizon widened. She learned more and more. David brought her many books to read, and they discussed them. She started to study English. The more she learned of things, the more she wanted to learn.

Often she went with David out to the villages when he sketched. He did another portrait of Rosa—it now hangs in the Modern Gallery in Madrid. He also painted a fine portrait of Marta, which Toño bought. Marta, who had come into a little money, quit her museum job and began taking drawing lessons from David.

Almost before Esperanza knew it, a whole year had rolled around and another, and she was still happy; they were both happy.

But more and more, now that his frescoes were nearly finished, David was drawn into political activities. Frequently he spoke at strike meetings or workers' demonstrations. He worked a great deal with the National Peasants' League, to which the artists' and writers' paper, *The Struggle*, had been turned over.

This was bringing him again into conflict with Rufo, and to Esperanza's sorrow, it brought a real rift with José and Adelita.

José told David that Rufo had told him, "Tell that blankety blank paint-dauber brother-in-law of yours that I'll get him if it takes me thirty years. I'll get him if I have to go after him to Alaska. But I'll get him."

José felt that David's attitude toward Rufo jeopardized his own position with the former majordomo and prevented his rising to the top in the councils of the Association.

Eventually he and David got into heated arguments, and ill-feeling grew until they rarely visited each other.

LIII

David sprang into such rapid prominence for his work as a leader of the new peasant organization that he was invited to Cuatla by the governor of the state of Morelos to make an address at the anniversary of Zapata's death. Esperanza went along.

In Cuatla, after a long dusty train trip that took them through Amecameca, they reached the hot little town in the low valley. They were at once conducted to a red-bunting platform in the churchyard near the white tomb of the martyred Zapata—a ridiculous monument for an anti-clerical and peasant leader, who had led the hosts of all southern Mexico into flaming revolt—a sentimental marble angel, holding up an unrolled scroll.

Above the pedestal were great masses of orange and purple flowers, wreaths bearing the names of two-score villages. All about the tomb, on the grass, on adjacent gravestones, on the walls, perched over the arched churchyard entrance, were hundreds of white-clad peasants in enormous high-crown sombreros, and with scarlet sarapes flung gracefully over stalwart shoulders. Every nook and corner was thronged with brown-faced folk.

There were many speeches over Zapata's grave. David gave a short talk.

Later, from the municipal palace, they looked down on ten thousand mounted agrarians, riding by in formation on wiry cayuses; huge silver-braided felt sombreros bobbed to the slow gait of the horses. The riders carried their guns, butts against the knee, or strapped to the pommels. A thrilling sight!

Once these men had thundered out of the rocky fastness of Morelos, dashing with quirt and spur and cry of liberty, down upon Cuatla, upon Cuernavaca, upon Yuatepec.

"Land and water! Land and schools! Land and liberty!"

They still had little enough of these things.

But viewing this vast procession, Esperanza got a new feeling for the movement of which José had been a part; she understood better the scenes and battles he had described.

Zapata and his spirit were still marching on. David talked to an old peasant from Huatitlán, and he told them in an awed whisper that when the sky grew dark with thunder Zapata still galloped by in the clouds; his figure was outlined in the heavens; his voice echoed in the winds.

A month after they got back from Cuatla, David finished his fresco.

For Esperanza, it was the most beautiful, impressive thing she had ever seen.

There was a formal unveiling. Many friends came.

Rosa was there. She looked chic in a new tailored outfit, which Esperanza had bought her for the occasion. With a smile, Es-

peranza noticed a certain young man lurking self-consciously in the offing.

Toño congratulated David warmly, but shook his head a bit forlornly; it was hard for him to think that anyone should try to paint differently from Raphael or Titian. Marta, still taking lessons from David, tried to show Toño the error of his ways.

Mercedes and Caraveo, now inseparable, Dr. Chávez, the Caldwells, and dozens of other good friends came.

Esperanza long since had taken Mercedes over to the Caldwells' to photograph Ida. They had been enchanted with her and her work, and every six months called her in and also sent her many new clients from the American colony.

Caldwell especially was taken with the beautiful Neapolitan girl, and from several chance remarks, Esperanza gathered he had not hesitated to make advances to her.

He joked with her now in his breezy, deaconish, half stern manner. Several times Marta glanced his way—they had greeted each other coldly—and she tossed her head with half angry repugnance. Toño and Chávez were still rivals for her attentions.

Chávez couldn't understand this, and to Esperanza he said wrathfully, "The man's pleasant, but he's an ass, a simple ass."

Chávez didn't have much use for people supposedly educated who couldn't think scientifically.

But the big surprise of the unveiling was a band, which came marching in, led by Bobo.

Bobo still lived in Toño's garage. He was quite a well-known figure these days, for he had helped make a dance orchestra very popular, especially among the university students. The orchestra featured trombone solos, and Bobo in his uniform was quite a spectacle blowing on an instrument almost as big as himself. Now he outdid himself, filling the patio with music.

From this day on, the Institute patio was always full of people, especially poor folk, looking at the frescoes.

"The common man understands and appreciates it," said David.

But the reactionary press, aside from two small pieces by Tirso Bardo and Toño, howled it down en masse.

"It is inconceivable," wrote one critic, "how any sane man could perpetrate the ferociously ugly frescoes on the walls of a public building—a distortion of everything truly Mexican. Why did the painter choose to depict Indians when there are truly beautiful types of Mexicans? This is to turn art into the hand-

maiden of the coarse and vulgar instead of seeking that which is superior —”

Rufo's *El Progreso* was especially vicious in its attacks.

Esperanza was furious.

David merely laughed. “They find the vacuous upper middle Creole class beautiful. They want smooth ivory skin, big eyes with long lashes, perfectly marcelled hair, lips painted to a carmine curve, high heels, sharp red finger nails—all the symbols of respectable prostitutes and parasites. I have merely satirized such types, to me so ugly—remember where Elenor appears in the third tier. Aside from such, I have painted women who are vital, who know life and its real struggles, its sorrows and joys, its failures and hopes.”

Controversy raged. Students of the university, egged on by the reactionary press and old fogey professors, mutilated one of the lower frescoes.

David patiently repaired it.

Similar mutilations had been perpetrated on paintings by David Siqueiros and Clemente Orozco in the Preparatory School.

Sometime later the Institute frescoes were officially celebrated with a banquet held for all the painters who had collaborated. Esperanza was thrilled to be among the guests.

David spoke. He talked easily and convincingly. He told how the press talked as though the country were still living in the hated feudal era of Porfirio Díaz; how the papers were constantly against every step taken toward progress and toward leading the people from the darkness of slavery to the light of education, economic freedom and culture. He explained his frescoes, how he had found the types among the people strong and beautiful, more vital than the handful of parasitical Creoles who had so long exploited the country for their own selfish interests. The women of the aristocracy were thin, pallid, artificial.

Then, boldly he charged the University rector, Severio Mallén, present at the head of the table, as being an arch-enemy of the revolution and of the government, a friend of reaction, and an instigator of the mutilation of the frescoes. What right, he demanded, has Señor Mallén to set himself as the sole judge of aesthetics, sociology and politics, to seek destruction of something which, good or bad, is the property of the nation, paid for out of the public treasury? Such vandalism violated every principle of free art.

Señor Mallén was merely playing cheap politics with Rufo Montalván.

Señor Mallén had betrayed his government and had abused the noble attributes of his high office.

A bombshell!

The dropping of a pin would have sounded like gun fire. Then there was a discreet coughing, nervous glances, covert grins. The banquet quickly broke up.

After David's onslaught, the newspapers, with the exception of Rufo's *El Progreso*, were now afraid to attack him for fear they would be manœuvred into a dangerous anti-government stand. Now there were actually articles upholding David's position and praising his painting.

Two weeks after the banquet the rector resigned.

It was a real blow for Rufo, who thus lost control of an important job in the government.

David, besides being an outstanding painter, was becoming a political power.

LIV

Guadalajara is one of those quiet Mexican cities which turns inwards and hides its multiple charms behind a mask of lazy simplicity. One has to wander through it casually, not too eager to know its secrets. There are no more hospitable folk in the world than those who live there, but to the uninitiate they are clannish and apart.

It is a place of sun and shade, of old palaces, and singing flower-filled patios and twilight songs, of mariachi orchestras and open hospitable doorways. And in the barred windows sit wistful women, lovely as the dawn and warm as the sun—the famous Tapatío type, the most entrancing of all Mexico.

Guadalajara was, those days, a place of landed aristocracy and of intrenched Catholicism. From these two forces it had acquired much of its air of easy opulence and its carefree but restrained gaiety, its feeling for old traditions; for it is a city founded nearly a hundred years before the "Mayflower," and with not too great change, it had followed a leisurely course down into the twentieth century, content with its ancient half-medieval ways.

Now the machine age had caught up with it. The new Southern Pacific railway had shoved in from the West. The agrarian revolution which had swept over so much of Mexico had been delayed

here and was now gathering headway. The religious struggle was becoming more acute. Feelings were becoming bitter.

And so the peace of Guadalajara was to be disrupted, and the scene to become grimmer precisely because of its delay in embracing new ways.

Quite apart from this new struggle going on, Esperanza enjoyed the beauty of the place. She and David were staying at a little pension in a yellow two-story building near the station. Guadalajara was very warm. But if their room, in spite of its high stucco ceiling, was stuffy, the patio, with its tall columns and balconies with plants, bird-cages and rocking chairs, was cool. The dinner tables were set out there under the arcades beside a dripping fountain with a bronze flamingo twisting its neck backwards. Unfortunately their landlady had swarms of cats and the backs of all the furniture were covered with cat fur, a sentimentalism Esperanza couldn't appreciate.

One June evening in Mexico City, David had unexpectedly proposed this trip to Guadalajara to her.

For some time he had been in contact with the Miners' Federation of Jalisco, which had refused to join Rufo's Association. They had invited David, who once had been a miner there himself, to speak to them and help them with organization plans. Garrido Tamez, who had studied painting with David in the San Carlo Academy, was now governor of the state, and was also anxious for him to come.

Esperanza got leave of absence from her museum work.

Just as they left home, the postman handed her a letter from Guadalupe.

She read it on the train. Guadalupe was about to have her third baby besides Tadeo. Ignacio had done very well in this as in more obvious material matters. But things in the village were still terrible, with all the land taken away. Pablo and Petra were well. Old Alvaro had died. The village no longer had a mask-maker. But the old dances had died out anyway.

The letter dropped from Esperanza's hand.

How time had flown by.

Since his fresco at the Institute, David had completed another one praised on all sides.

His political activities had widened and the feud between him and Rufo had grown more bitter.

Now David and Esperanza were on their way to Guadalajara.

The train had rolled out beyond Contreras, curving up and up toward the Contreras gap.

It had been a long hard trip, but for Esperanza new and thrilling. They went second class and had sat up all night on the hard benches. But if anything, Esperanza had endured it better than David.

The car was a stack of squalling babies, squawking parrots, clucking chickens, thrumming guitars, whimpering curs. Aisles and seats were littered with fibre bags of oranges and mameyes, baskets of food, red pottery. Mostly Indians. Tall, broad straw and felt sombreros surmounted twitching bundles of brown flesh under scarlet sarapes. A tall Yaqui, head bandaged in a red bandanna, lay on one of the benches, moaning with fever, bare sandal-shod feet hanging into the aisles. The flies crawled over the pus-filled eyes of a baby. A man with a long, stringy, half-moon moustache, reached up to rip off a banana from a bunch dangling from a rack. The dim lights flickered unsteadily. Bundles and coats swayed violently as the train whirled around mountain curves; the car windows reflected the bizarre scene.

From the train vender, they bought beer and invited two soldiers of the train guard, stationed in their car, to drink with them.

It grew late. Esperanza dozed off.

After a while, shifting in her sleep, she looked out. Broad yellow wheat fields lay like a saffron sea under the moon, a pale sickle dogged by the morning star. On a far hill, the half-orange dome of a church gleamed gold. Then came endless stretches of brown desolation, rocks, cactus, sand, palo blanco, long gulleys winding back into jagged purple mountains.

A good place for a hold-up, thought Esperanza.

In Guadalajara she had been eager to see everything, and had rushed around to the old landmarks, out to Zapopan and to the quaint pottery town of Tlaquepaque. But gradually the heat wore her down and she was more content to loaf.

Now David was so busy meeting people of all sorts from the Governor down, that Esperanza found plenty to do helping him with letters, clipping papers, copying documents and running errands.

A strike was brewing in the mines. David talked it over with three of the local leaders, blunt Indian and mestizo types, with gnarled hands and toil-worn faces.

The new constitution guaranteed them safety appliances,

workers' compensation, eight hours, medical assistance and other rights, none of which the mine owners had granted. Several months before, there had been a bad explosion which had killed five miners.

The whole state was now deeply agitated in many ways. Bands of armed religious rebels, known as "Cristeros" were rampaging about, killing and looting.

The struggle with the Church was now coming to a head. The government had imposed new regulatory restrictions on the priests, obliging them to register like doctors or lawyers.

The priests refused and the Church called a strike for August 1.

Esperanza went around to the various churches, flaming with candles, jammed with frantic people. Couples were hastening to get married. Thousands of infants were being baptized or christened. The churches sounded like calf-branding pens. The priests in the center of these vast throngs, sweated, grunted, baptized, christened and collected fees wholesale.

Finally, August 1, a hot, sizzling day, the heat waves dancing up from the pavements, the priests walked out of their churches. The government took over the buildings, ordering them kept open by neighborhood committees.

Esperanza found herself near the sanctuary of Our Mother of Guadalupe.

The faithful had barricaded the doors and now shouted defiance at the soldiers who had been mobilized to dislodge them.

A machine-gun corps came clattering down the street.

The soldiers prepared to break in the portals.

People high up on the Carmelite belfries hurled down stones and defiance.

Presently the soldiers opened fire.

Esperanza found protection in a doorway.

The besieged, mostly women, shrieked and hurled stones.

A woman, shot through the breast, teetered on the edge of the parapet, then plunged with a last scream into the street and was crushed beyond recognition.

Esperanza went sick at the pit of her stomach.

The soldiers tried to eject the crowd, but were driven back.

Setting their machine guns at the entrance, they opened fire, a long death rattle.

Presently a white flag fluttered from one of the belfries.

The soldiers ceased firing. An officer went forward to parley.

The folk inside came filing out between the soldiers. Each defender was rapidly searched and taken to the police station.

The bodies were dragged out, like so many dead animals, and piled on the sidewalk, a bloody, mangled heap of forty or so.

That noon, Esperanza could scarcely touch her food. To David she expressed doubts as to such brutal tactics.

"Authority is usually without imagination or restraint. But look!"

He pulled out the pastoral of the local ecclesiastic, excommunicating all peasants who accepted lands from the government.

Esperanza recalled then what Father Mateo had done in Milpa Verde; how for so long a time he had prevented them from getting a school, how he had led a mob to tear up the school gardens.

"And that has been going on all over Mexico," commented David. "Down in Tepetopēc, where I went two days ago, the priest also made the villagers build him a new curatage, though he already had the finest house in the village and lives with three 'nieces.' One is just a cheap, mestiza dance hall girl. And yet school can't be held because the roof leaks. It has only a dirt floor."

He showed her another document. "And here are letters from the rebel Cristeros to the mine managers that they won't damage their property and will help put down the strikers. One mine owner has given them money and arms."

The mine strike was called. The miners, having the sympathy of the Governor and the neutrality of the federal military commandant, were in a strong position.

The only dissidents were small groups in the Catholic unions and in Rufo's Association. The mine owners provided these with guns, and they continued to work, though operations were mostly paralyzed.

Negotiations were opened in the local San Francisco hotel, with government officials present. David rang Esperanza in as his secretary.

An odd gathering. Only two miners' representatives wore European clothes—David and the Guadalajara business manager; those direct from the mines, Indians and mestizos, came in overalls or white cotton suits; but they knew what they wanted.

Three mine owners were American engineers, four were Mexi-

cans. The Mexicans were well-dressed, suave. The Americans, frontier types, were two-fisted, aggressive men.

One, Jim Richfield, a big-faced, loud-voiced overseer, came in a gray flannel shirt, khaki trousers, and high boots, which, when it pleased him, he arrogantly stuck up on the conference table.

He had been in charge of the Ecatepec Star Gold Mine ever since the Díaz days, when a manager could maltreat, flog or kill miners with utter impunity. He could not believe that times had changed.

He sat in the conferences, picking his teeth, his dark pin-cushion chin and reddish whisky eyes stuck forward angrily, his only contribution being in very bad Spanish, "No, goddam it, no!"

David warned him sharply each time to moderate his language and several times told him to take his hat off.

After three weeks of negotiations, all the other managers were willing to arbitrate, but Richfield continued to growl, "No, goddam it, no."

He stood up. The cigarette drooping loosely from his mouth fell to the floor. Crunching it under heel, he banged out.

Each night, after the conferences, down in the lobby, Richfield met the sandy-haired American consul, Ernest Galton, a tall, dried-up chap of bureaucratic exactitude, and filled him full of tall yarns. The strikers had killed loyal workers; the strikers threatened to seize and flood the mines. This would mean the loss of millions.

Each time, the consul rushed back to his office and sent off alarmed dispatches to the State Department. An official Washington release told of lurid dangers to American lives and properties.

The American Ambassador got busy. More troops were moved in—to satisfy American diplomatic pressure. No one in the United States knew or cared that the mine owners were violating the law of the land.

At the next conference, David bluntly ordered Richfield to take his feet off the table and act like a gentleman.

Richfield turned purple, broke into a string of curses and again banged out.

Down in the lobby he told the consul that David was a dangerous Bolshevik, paid by the Russians, and the next day Washington dispatches, from an "official" but "unrevealed" source, called

the miners' strike a terrible "communist uprising, led by paid Moscow agents."

Every day the strike situation became more serious. It was harder to keep the men in order.

Pressure from Mexico City was getting stronger to end the strike. More and more troops were moved in. Outside strike-breakers were brought in. The Association and Catholic unions mysteriously gained many new members and guns.

About this time Rufo was appointed head of the National Labor Bureau. It gave him great leverage in the mine troubles, especially as his association was playing the rôle of strike-breaker.

More sessions were held in the San Francisco hotel. Deadlock —

That was a Saturday night. Sunday morning David consulted with his fellows and spent the rest of the day deciding what steps they would take.

Late Sunday night, David received amazing news. Richfield had reported to the government that the Star Gold Mine no longer needed federal troops, that except for a few disgruntled persons, the miners had gone back to work.

David at once suspected that he had some violence planned. He decided he must go in person to the strike front and size things up for himself.

He and Esperanza set out Monday morning. The train chugged along for four hours. The hot dry season—clouds of fine dust cut off the landscape and coated their faces and clothes. The air was sultry, choking.

At the Ecatepec station, at the foot of a jagged black mountain, David and Esperanza were met by a miners' delegation. The owners had cut off all bus service, so they had to do the seven miles to the mine up a winding road, along the barren flanks of the crags, on foot under the blazing sun.

Heat waves danced on the bare rocks. A buzzard wheeled slowly overhead. The organ cactus stood up stiff and spiny. The low plants by the roadside were coated with fine reddish dust. The air was heavy, metallic, menacing.

Presently they rounded a spur of bare, baked mountain, almost devoid of vegetation.

Ahead were the mine and stamp mill. Aerial carriers, now idle, swung over the ravine to the big dump of fine black sand and cinders, a huge scar far down the mountain.

The place looked deserted and forlorn. No smoke drifted up from the plant or from the mine shacks clustered along a small ridge about the shaft entrance. Silence hung like a dead weight in the hot day.

As they came nearer, a cheer went up from a group of miners.

David, already known personally to some of them from years ago, now by word of mouth, had become a legendary figure.

Soon he was shaking hands with several hundred of them, his strong face beaming.

They stuck him up on a black rock to talk.

He told them they must stand shoulder to shoulder, by their wives and children, their comrades there and in other mines. He recommended no violence, but they should have their guns beside them, ready for any emergency. One might come soon.

To Esperanza, David said: "I'm sorry I brought you here. There's going to be serious trouble."

"I much prefer to be by your side and share it. Don't the miners have wives? I would rather be with them and you, than merely safe."

He squeezed her arm with approval.

While David and the leaders conferred, she went off with several miners' wives, thin, haggard, breast-shrivelled creatures, with starving babies. Uncomplainingly they had survived on a few ground tortillas, edible roots and cactus leaves.

Before turning into a hut, Esperanza gazed across the barren miles of valley. A vast scene. Far below in the steep, narrow cleft was a trickle of water, silver in the bright sunlight, a ribbon through an occasional patch of corn.

On the other side stretched a wild tangle of mountains, rising ever higher toward Colima, where nature had flung up a great snow volcano—a majestic region, violent, rugged, dark, scarcely tamed by man's hand, not like the wide meadows around Amecameca. Here nature was convulsive and cruel.

A messenger ran into camp, lathered like a horse.

The Candela mine, twenty-five miles distant, had been attacked in the night by Cristeros. Twenty miners had been killed, five in the fight, the rest butchered after surrendering.

The Cristeros were moving south! Probably they would attack the Star Mine that very night!

Now David understood Richfield's request for the removal of troops. Curious business! The government was supposed to be

making war on the Cristeros, but had withdrawn its forces so they would have a free hand to help the strike-breakers.

David rushed a messenger to the Ecatepec telegraph station with a news release. "The miners are organized into a battalion to fight the Cristeros on behalf of the government." To the federal commandant in Guadalajara, he sent a wire demanding protection.

The mine settled down to tense expectancy. David took charge. A small group of armed men kept vigil on a crag above the mine, an impregnable place.

The rest concentrated in the homes just below, in excellent position to fight. These preparations were made with great secrecy so the strike-breakers, close to the shaft, would not realize what was going on.

Twilight fell over the grim empty landscape. The mountains loomed up like shaggy animals.

Folk stood about in anxious groups, women gaunt with blue rebozos tight over heads and cheeks, men humming low sad songs, their white trousers and white hats separated by their dark faces and rough-woven sarapes.

Night settled down cold and gloomy. A shrill wind polished the tarnished stars; it cut to the very marrow.

The undernourished folk shivered miserably. They kept on talking in low whispers. Few felt like sleeping.

No one knew when the attack might come.

LV

Esperanza woke with a startled jolt. She had fallen asleep over her gun.

Dogs were barking. She peered out. It was nearly dawn.

Hoofs sounded on rocks. Three hundred mounted men whirled along the lower slopes, vague silhouettes against the star-lit sky over the big valley.

The strike-breakers there below at the shaft joined the newcomers.

The invaders tethered their horses and moved cautiously up toward miners' huts, silent and dark.

Those within waited.

When the Cristeros were fairly close, the defenders sent a round of hot fire through their ranks.

Esperanza, a good shot, fired carefully.

The bullets whined. Now and then they crackled through the wattle walls.

The Cristeros soon fell back in confusion. They ducked behind rocks to keep up the shooting.

Intermittent firing kept up until dawn, then ceased.

The resultant silence was uncanny. Esperanza was surprised suddenly to hear birds singing.

The women, faces smudged with powder and grease, looked at each other haggardly in the dim light.

During the lull, the Cristero leaders went over to one of the huts to hold a conference.

David saw a grand chance to cut them off from their forces.

Near the hut was an undefended steel tower with a platform and water tank, which dominated most of the lower encampment and the mine shaft. If a sortie was sent out, the men could cut off the leaders, then seize the unguarded tower and hold it.

Twenty men were chosen and given the best weapons. They crouched ready.

"Off!" called David.

With a scuffling of guaraches, they leapt forward.

They gained fully fifty yards before the enemy, taken completely by surprise, could get their guns sighted.

The intrenched miners above peppered the Cristeros to protect the charge of their companions.

The twenty miners kept going under the Cristero fire, but could reach neither the hut nor the tower.

They did drive a wedge into the enemy, then taking refuge in an outcropping of rocks, they swept fire into the hut.

Those inside burst through the opposite wattle wall and dashed down the hillside. Two threw up their arms and fell sprawling.

From the other side, though, the little band of twenty was sadly outnumbered. The dismayed Cristeros, recovering their confidence, advanced on them, crawling from rock to rock.

Four miners were killed.

David, sizing up the dangerous situation, dispatched another twenty men down a steep path to the right toward another parapet of rocks.

This second group of raiders hit the enemy on the flank just as they were about to rush the first trapped group.

Their momentum was so furious that the Cristeros fell back in confusion.

The rest of the miners, now seeing their chance, leapt from their defences, rifles hugged under their left arms, machetes in hand, and fell on the Cristeros.

The sharp blades flashed. Hand to hand struggles began.

More and more miners rushed down.

Soon, the Cristeros, divided, confused, retreated down hill.

The retreat became a rout.

One burly miner, close behind a fleeing Cristero, lifted his machete with a mighty swing.

Esperanza gave a cry. The man's head jumped half loose from his body, which jack-knifed.

The bloody carcass jumped from rock to rock, fell from a small bluff and hung in a false pepper-tree.

The miners gained possession of the tower and the mine shaft. They dominated the field.

The Cristeros rushed to their horses and fled down the ravine, picking their way as rapidly as possible among the steep rocks.

The miners were wild with jubilation.

The strike-breakers fled on foot. A few drifted back into camp and joined with the strikers.

David was dog-tired, his face lined, covered with powder and smoke. Esperanza, equally weary, poured him a stiff drink.

They toasted their victory.

He hurried out to take precautions against surprise counter-attack.

The women were already weeping over their dead. Seven miners and nine Cristeros had been killed, twenty-two in all seriously wounded. The victors attended to the wounded as best they could without supplies, and buried the dead.

Papers from one of the fallen Cristero leaders were brought to David.

He whistled. One was a pact between Rufo's Association and the Catholic Union to oppose the Miners' Federation. The Catholic Union declared that if necessary it could call upon the assistance of the Cristero rebels—the very ones fighting the government.

This was so damaging, David decided to return at once directly to Mexico City to put the document into the hands of the President himself.

In Guadalajara, during David's absence, the miners and man-

agers had finally agreed to arbitration, even the ill-mannered Richfield.

Too soon the miners discovered the joker in it. Richfield was in direct contact with Rufo, and Rufo had gotten a presidential decree, nationalizing all arbitration of strike disputes in mines, railroads and the electrical industry, precisely the industries in which his association had little foothold. This took arbitration out of the Governor's state board, where the strikers were sure of friendly treatment, and put it into the hands of federal agents directly under Rufo, who had been strike-breaking and playing with the Cristeros. A clever manipulation.

The only hope now was for David to get the incriminating documents into the President's hands before any decisive step could be taken by Rufo.

He and Esperanza took the evening train for Mexico City.

Beyond La Barca—it was a moonless night—the train stopped with a jerk. Firing whipped up from a little gully paralleling the track.

"Rebels!" cried the passengers in fright.

The train guard, about fifty soldiers, took positions at the windows and returned the fire.

Men, women and children passengers screamed. They threw themselves on the floor. Some rushed out on the platforms and were shot or jumped off into the dark where they ran or lay down in the brush.

David grabbed Esperanza and rushed her over the prostrate forms. Seizing a cane, he smashed two end lights as they passed.

At the door of the car, he held her for a moment to whisper above the din.

"Follow me. Don't stop a second on the platform. Take a run and jump right off into the dark. You may get scratched a bit."

Esperanza patted his cheek.

He leapt.

She heard him land with a rattle of gravel.

She drew a deep breath. Two steps took her across the platform.

With all her will—it was too dark to see the ground—she jumped off into space.

The earth came up and hit her. Her legs doubled under her. She slid in the gravel, scratching the skin off one hand.

She rolled to one side unhurt and lay still, panting, praying that David was all right. The bullets whistled over her.

His arm came about her. He kissed her in the dark and laughed softly.

LVI

The battle continued. Glass crashed in the cars. Wood splintered. The bullets still whined.

"Let's get into the Pullman," yelled David. "It's steel."

They crept along the ground toward the end of the train. After what seemed hours, they reached the last car.

"Crawl in on your belly," ordered David.

He shoved her up the steps and clambered in after her.

Flat on their faces, they wormed inside.

The lights had been snapped off. Just within the entrance glowed the lighted tip of the cigar of someone seated on the corridor floor.

There was something reassuring about that man quietly smoking there in the dark with bullets whining all about.

"We are passengers," said David, so as not to alarm him.

"I used to be," said the unknown man, good-naturedly. His accent revealed him to be an Englishman.

David and Esperanza crawled past him. Pullman passengers were lying on the floor, their heads tucked against the steam pipes.

They came to a compartment. A family, American, a man and three women, were lying flat, their baggage piled on top of them.

Two soldiers had smashed the window and were firing. One soldier was seated on the prostrate man, the other on one of the women.

David pushed Esperanza inside.

The soldier sitting on the woman gave a cry and keeled over. The blood spurted out of him over her face.

She screamed. .

David jumped forward and caught his rifle. Unbuckling the man's cartridge belt, he yanked it free from his twitching body, and put it close by, then took his place at the window.

Peering out, his eyes gradually accustomed themselves to the contour of the countryside. It was impossible to see the attackers,

lying at the edge of a gully, but whenever he saw a gun flash, he put a bead on the spot.

A desperate business—this—because, in some train attacks, the Cristeros had put all passengers, men, women and children, to death with shouts of "Long Live Christ, the King."

For nearly four hellish hours, the firing kept up. By that time every soldier defending the train had been killed except the one in the compartment.

When David realized they were drawing the concentrated fire of the rebels, he told his companion to cease firing.

"They will kill me!" cried the brave soldier. "And if I escape it will be thought I wasn't doing my duty."

David snatched off the man's cap, tossed it out the window and shoved his own hat into his hand. "Take my coat, too. Tell the rebels you are a chauffeur. I'll see you get a special citation for bravery. Don't worry."

David gave the precious strike papers to Esperanza. She shoved them into her bosom.

All firing ceased. There was a long silence, deathly long.

Suddenly Esperanza heard, sharper than the cry of a rooster, a laugh, shrill in the night.

The attackers leapt through the train, firing recklessly, jabbing bayonets under the seats.

They invaded the Pullman.

Someone snapped on the lights.

The Englishman, so calmly smoking his cigar, a tall, bony man of about sixty, leisurely got to his feet.

Each invader wore the image of Guadalupe on his hat, and on the hip a bottle or two of tequilla. All were pretty drunk.

They ordered all the passengers to stand up.

A tall man leapt from the end platform and dashed off through the night.

"Stop, you long-legged devil!" cried the Cristeros.

Bullets sizzled around him, but he kept right on going till he disappeared in the brush.

The attackers swarmed through the car. They ripped open baggage, demanded money, yanked the jewels off the women.

The tall, elderly Englishman reached over and calmly lifted the cap off the head of one of the religious bandits, at the same time offering his own felt hat in exchange.

"Here, caballero, have a good hat," he said smiling. "I like yours. Otherwise, we might forget each other."

The rebel, astonished, examined his gift, then smiled. "Very good," he said, in a friendly fashion.

Others were tearing open the Englishman's bag. One bandit seized a pair of trousers lying on top.

The Englishman seized the other end.

"You can't have 'em," he said, authoritatively. "My wife would give me hell."

The Cristero, tugging at the trousers, looked at him blankly, then laughed and went on to other things.

The attackers burst into the compartment. Amazed at the full-length mirror, believing it must be a door, they shouted at those inside to come out.

Finding no way to open it, they fired their guns point blank into it. The heavy, beveled glass fell crashing.

"Let's get out of here," said David.

Falling in between several of the attackers, they descended from the Pullman.

Flames were rapidly eating up the sides of the wooden first- and second-class cars. Soon they were hot and crackling. The blaze leapt skyward.

To her horror, Esperanza heard the screams of the sick and wounded whom the Church rebels had not bothered to remove. They were being burned alive.

Soon the flames made everything near at hand light as day. Over on the high bank, Esperanza saw a big touring car. The dancing light flickered on a purple banner:

HAIL CHRIST THE KING

Several solemn priests descended, crosses uplifted.

To her horror, at the same time, Esperanza smelled the penetrating odor of burning carrion.

The priests came forward to give absolution to the dying.

The train thoroughly looted, the attackers assembled their horses and started south.

The priests slipped back into their car. It disappeared in the direction of Guadalajara.

For hours passengers searched among the hot ruins for the bodies of their loved ones. A beautiful woman, her long hair hanging down, rushed to and fro, wailing, her dead baby in her

arms. A man staggered past, his dead wife, her head matted with blood, over his shoulder. Two men, gone raving mad, ran around shrieking.

Esperanza stumbled over a lost, weeping child, crouching near the track. It had been shot through the shoulder.

Chilly though it was, David, who had given his coat to the soldier, yanked off his shirt, and they bound up the wound.

The child's father had been killed in the attack, so they kept it by them while they huddled with the other passengers waiting for a relief train.

David was worried at the delay because of the ticklish stage of the strike negotiations. Every hour was precious.

LVII

David got nowhere with the President.

"He's in too deep with Rufo," David told Esperanza, "to take a stand against him, and he's afraid of offending American property owners despite his numerous pronouncements attacking foreign exploiters."

Meanwhile diplomatic pressure had grown stronger. Troops were again sent to the mines, this time to drive out the Federation. A week later, David was advised that the Federation would have to abide by the results of federal arbitration, which meant, of course, whatever Rufo decided.

David was bitter. Rufo had won. The Federation had lost. The men had to go back to work, having gained little. Gradually Federation leaders, despite the arbitration board ruling to the contrary, were fired.

And David more than ever had made a mortal enemy of Rufo, now in a still more powerful position, deep in the confidence of the government, a man who would hesitate at no crime.

Fortunately David now had a chance to go to the United States as a delegate to an anti-imperialist congress. On his way back he planned to spend several months organizing peasants in northern states.

Esperanza, though it was wise that he absent himself for a while, was very broken up by it—their first long separation.

In his absence, she took Rosa—it was vacation time—up to Milpa Verde to see Pablo and Petra and Guadalupe. She took two folding cots along, for since she was little Rosa had never slept on a petate.

How time rushed by! Rosa was sixteen now, large for her age, already beautiful.

She was molded to an entirely different world than that of Esperanza, was part and parcel of the city, used to nice clothes, unaware of poverty. As Rosa had grown up, Esperanza had dressed her as fashionably as possible. This had caused her to take increasing care with her own appearance.

Whatever Rosa thought of her mother she kept it mostly to herself. Actually she adored her and was terribly fond of David, for whom she stood up staunchly against the opinions of her schoolmates, mostly from aristocratic families, for his modernistic painting.

Milpa Verde proved dreary. People had moved away, among them Arnulfo and Lolita. Those who remained were mostly miserable and half starving. The school had long been closed. After the brief flourishing with new lands, the village had swung back to a dull despair.

Nor was the hacienda working. There was too much disturbance. Bandits drove off all the livestock. Any one who dared work on the fields was sniped at from the brush. Several had been killed.

The greatest change was that since the church strike, Father Mateo had been forced to leave. The countryside was no longer safe for him.

In spite of all, Pablo had not done badly. Besides the little orchard around the house, he had taken land on shares. Ignacio, too, had done well, and his marriage with Guadalupe had turned out famously. Both were very happy. She had but recently had another child, the third besides Tadeo, now seven years old.

"He's very kind to me even when drunk," said Guadalupe, and that, thought Esperanza, was much to say for any village husband.

Esperanza, even though times were so bad, was happy in the village, but Rosa, at first interested, soon found the place a terrible bore.

Caldwell, his wife and girl, Ida, now eighteen, came up from the city to the Big House. There were sour grumblings in the village that the "gringo thief" ought to be killed.

The three of them came down to the village to see Guadalupe and Tadeo. Caldwell, now nearly fifty, gray, partially bald, tried still to be a gay dog in his manners. Mrs. Caldwell had filled out,

seemed in much better health and spirits. Ida was a gangling anæmic blonde, still wearing glasses.

As before, they invited the two girls and the children up to the Big House.

Esperanza took Caldwell to task for his failure to keep his promise about the lands—a subject she had avoided in Mexico City.

“My good girl,” he said, in a fatherly way, “I preferred to have peace with the villagers, but the bank would not listen. For a few, unimportant stony acres, it has had so much trouble that it has not even gotten the interest on its money and has had to pay through the nose for upkeep and guards.”

“But you have full control over the bank, don’t you?”

Caldwell explained. “I have. But though we hold the mortgages, I have only an advisory power on the receivership, appointed at the request of the defunct bank.”

High finance, she decided, had a way of concealing its processes for no good purpose. She changed the subject to Winifred.

His eyes brightened. “Seventeen now, older than her mother when she was born,” he remarked, not very grammatically. “She’s beautiful and very clever in her studies.”

Caldwell suggested that Rosa go riding with Ida. He would send a trusted *mozo* along. “The feeling toward us around here is so hostile I’m afraid to have her go out alone.”

Ida had an extra riding habit, a little tight about the hips and chest for Rosa, but passable.

Rosa was delighted. Rosa, who liked Ida very much, became more reconciled to Milpa Verde.

One day Mrs. Caldwell asked Rosa if she wouldn’t come to the Big House to stay while they were there so as to be with Ida more.

“Oh, I can’t,” cried Rosa, her eyes shining. “I would love to, but I wouldn’t think of leaving mother.”

“Have your mother stay here, too.”

“Oh, that would be different.” She danced off to tell Esperanza.

Esperanza was pleased. “You go, dear; it will be a nice experience for you. I wouldn’t leave Pablo and Petra, but we’ll see each other every day.”

In Amecameca, several times, Esperanza saw Pepita, now quite

dummy and fat, ugly, ignorant and frowsy. She did not introduce herself.

Pepita now had six children besides Winifred, a fairly industrious record. Three had kinky hair and thick lips. Again Esperanza thought of fair little Winifred.

Happening by Pepita's house near the railroad tracks, Esperanza saw Pepita's old grandmother nodding on the stoop. About sixty-five now, she was obviously a wiry, ash-colored mulatto.

Pepita's husband now had more competition. From muleteer profits, Gerónimo had become a town alderman. He had married Margarita, a Milpa Verde girl, niece of Don Clemente.

Back in Mexico City, Rosa returned to school. Though Rosa now lived at the apartment, Esperanza felt dreadfully lonesome without David. She still had her government job, but it did not at present take up much time. At odd moments, she went down to the Peasant League on Cinco de Febrero street—a large upstairs hall with a small stage, where she addressed letters and papers.

She discovered she was pregnant. She was glad to have a child by David, which she hoped would cement them together for the rest of life.

She was not so good-looking any more, was becoming matronly. Ruefully she thought, he would have to find someone else for a model now. Perhaps it was just as well, he now liked politics better than painting.

David wrote her faithfully twice a week. He was in Coahuila, busy organizing, apparently happy. The League was supporting Obregón for President, and they were organizing a new agrarian party to back him—the only hope, David wrote, of saving anything out of the revolution, betrayed by Calles through his new pacts with Ambassador Morrow.

Rufo's Association was holding sullenly aloof from Obregón, trying to bargain support for promises of jobs.

But Obregón did not trust Rufo. Bitterness developed between them till an open breach occurred.

Esperanza told José, busy drumming up support for the Association, that he ought to jump out and get in David's group.

But José had too many links with Rufo.

"Rufo may have his faults, but he's going places. He'll be President himself some day. He's ruthless, but he has to be. Practical politics can't be run by pure idealism. If you get a little

idealism thrown in you're lucky. And Rufo isn't looking just at the present moment."

The campaign opened. Soon, during meetings, bullets spattered around Obregón. Rufo's strong-arm gang was working better than ever. He certainly was a brutal man, who would stop at nothing.

Esperanza again visited Rufo's national convention. José was delegate from Amecameca.

Rufo lifted up his now bulky body and thunderously shouted that all the leaders of his party, if necessary, would leave their good government jobs and go into the trenches to fight for labor.

Brave words, but Esperanza told José she couldn't conceive of Rufo, grown so fat, his hands glittering with diamonds, rich with auto cars, houses, businesses and mistresses, risking his life in any trench for labor or anything else.

They came close to quarreling.

One day she saw Lola Tabor driving down Avenida Juárez in a swanky roadster and learned—on inquiry of Julia, who always seemed to know the latest scandal—that Lola had become one of Rufo's favorite mistresses.

David returned. Esperanza was happy as a bird to have him back.

He was enthusiastic that they were going to have a child and caressed her far more tenderly than he had for a long time.

Soon he had to leave again, this time for the state of Michoacán.

She was worried lest he might be trapped in trouble there, for everybody expected Arnulfo Gómez and Serrano, rival candidates, to revolt. Things were growing very tense.

One day candidate Obregón's auto was attacked in Chapultepec by would-be assassins, speeding by in another car. Various suspects were lined up and brutally shot, including a priest. Many people thought this arbitrary act was an attempt by Calles to shield his friends Rufo and Morones, but José assured Esperanza that it really was a Catholic plot.

Again David got back. Soon after, Gómez and Serrano did revolt. Both were promptly captured and shot, also without trial, along with dozens of their followers. Mexico ran with blood—in the name of human ideals, all rather tarnished.

Milpa Verde, Esperanza thought bitterly, had remained without lands. What was all this violence about? A sordid struggle for power, little more.

It pained her that the two beings she loved most should be in opposite camps.

The campaign whirled to a hectic finish. Obregón was elected in the customary vote-stealing manner, though undoubtedly he did have the majority of the country behind him.

Now Rufo—the full hostility of the new administration against him—would find it hard sledding. So would José.

David had great plans. "We shall do something about Milpa Verde right away," he told her. "American bank or no bank, Ambassador Morrow or no Ambassador. I've gotten official promises. I'm on my way to a banquet in honor of Obregón's victory—out in the Bombilla in San Angel."

That afternoon, returning from the museum, Esperanza heard an extra called:

OBREGON SHOT AT BOMBILLA BANQUET

"No!" she cried, and snatched the paper from the newsie. Fearing for David, she skimmed through the account to find if any one else had been injured.

The assassin, a religious fanatic, under the pretext of making cartoons of those present at the banquet—a frequent stunt at such gatherings—asked permission to show his sketch to Obregón himself. He came up behind the President-elect with a gun concealed under his pad and had sprayed bullets from a repeating automatic into his back. What cold-blooded nerve!

She could hardly wait to get David's account of what had happened.

He rushed in late, upset, furious.

"Don't bother me now!" he shouted, and strapped on a gun, a terrible light in his eyes.

"What are you going to do, David!" she cried.

"We're going to get that Rufo. He's at the bottom of this, and he'll pay. All his gang will pay."

Esperanza tried to calm him, but he shook her off and rushed out.

All his gang will pay—Esperanza thought of José. Feelings were running so high anything might happen.

She rushed over to his house.

Adelita was there and said a little primly that José was in a safe place. Adelita was always a bit frigid, but since David and Rufo were pitted against each other, she had become more and more hostile to Esperanza.

Fortunately or unfortunately the Obregonistas couldn't find Rufo. Nor did they find José or any one else of importance.

Gradually passions subsided.

Later, David admitted that though Rufo's and Morones' cliques had created an atmosphere of hostility toward Obregón, the assassin was really a religious fanatic. He got Esperanza a pass for the subsequent trial of the assassin, José Toral, and his accomplice, the nun, Mother Conchita, head of a clandestine convent.

Tragedy and bitter passion enveloped the courtroom. One man was hauled out by the police for shouting "Viva Cristo Rey." At another session fifty armed Congressmen burst in, and in foul language, menaced the accused, the defence attorneys and the jury with waving revolvers.

The exciting sessions made Esperanza ill. She had to go to bed.

Rosa had gone off early that morning with her class to visit the pyramids. Only David was in the house. Esperanza had to call to him to do things for her.

Unlike himself, he was abrupt and sharp. He had just started a canvas, and he was always so pent up when he had a job of painting—sometimes would work twenty or more hours at a stretch—that he hated to be interrupted.

She began to have bad pains. This was the time the child was shifting, but why this terrible pain that grew worse and worse? It felt like a miscarriage.

She called him and suggested he get a doctor.

"Yes, yes," he said, half absently. "But it's natural. You'll probably be all right in a bit."

They had no phone, and she knew how much he disliked leaving his canvas to go out.

But she had to call him again.

"I—I think it's serious," she said, suppressing a groan.

"Don't worry," he replied, a bit irritably. "I'll go."

She had always been so healthy, it was hard for him to adjust himself to the idea that anything at all might be the matter with her.

Her pain was excruciating. Again she had to call him.

"Yes, yes, right away. Just this tiny corner to finish. Otherwise I'll ruin the whole thing. It won't take a minute."

It took a good many minutes. Her pain continued. She had a slight hemorrhage.

Terribly frightened, nevertheless she made no further complaint and listened anxiously to hear him go out.

After a while, she heard the door open, then was frightened at being alone. Her pain became frightful.

But David had not gone. Julia Patterson had dropped in.

Surprised to see Esperanza in bed, in a moment she became alarmed and rushed out to get Dr. Chávez.

Chávez was furious. "I should have been called at once!" he exclaimed, removing his glasses and wrinkling his nose. "She might have died. There is some very serious complication."

"I—I didn't realize—" stammered David, contrite.

Chávez swore under his breath, and Julia in her frank way blurted out at David:

"I suppose you think one of your darn canvases about humanity is more important than two human lives. You men are all blundering fools. I'm glad I got rid of my husband long ago. And if it weren't for Esperanza, I'd never sell another of your rotten canvases."

For two days Esperanza lay in terrible agony, constantly fed dope.

Finally the miscarriage occurred.

She was not quite herself for over four months, her nerves in a terrible state. She often found herself weeping for no reason at all, and precipitated a number of unnecessary scenes with David.

She brooded and often wondered, since he had been so indifferent when she was suffering, whether he really cared for her at all. She exaggerated every little thoughtlessness on his part and became unhappy over it.

LVIII

Adelita came rushing over, pale and distraught to tell Esperanza that José was in jail.

Soon after Provisional President Portes Gil was inaugurated, a police drive was made against Rufo's Association and other labor and peasant groups. Though the government did not dare touch either Morones or Rufo Montalván, important leaders were arrested. José had gotten caught in the drag-net.

After some effort, Adelita and Esperanza located David. He at once rushed around to see influential people.

As ill-luck would have it, this was when Esperanza's hands

were full preparing for a party for Rosa, just finishing Preparatory School. It was too late to call the affair off.

There was a graduation dress to be made, and a party dress, and gifts to be bought.

Esperanza, indulging herself in a new gown, old rose and gold, flattered herself she did not cut such a bad figure along with the youngsters, though she was too distracted about José to be a good hostess.

Rosa was quite taken with Rafael Brockman, a young engineer, whom she had met at a house-warming given by Julia in her new home. Brockman, of part German origin, worked for a large American company and was a serious, but good-humored chap, a bit over-punctilious and formal. Esperanza liked him very much. He was a real person on whom one could rely. Soon he became a frequent visitor at the apartment, often inviting Rosa and Esperanza to movies or dances.

Much as Esperanza liked him, she was wise enough to be a little critical of him to Rosa, which incensed her very much.

After a week's effort, David got José freed. It healed the breach between the two families.

José came to the apartment furious.

"Such things are going to mean trouble," he spluttered. "Say, do you know what happened to a man who yelled 'Hail Christ the King' in the courtroom when they were trying Toral and Mother Conchita for assassinating Obregón? He was in jail with me—about ten of us in one big cage. At midnight the guard came in and picked him out.

"We heard a volley down in the patio. A cart rumbled out. That was the last of him—no trial, nothing, buried without his family even knowing about it. That might have happened just as easily to one of us, I guess."

David talked seriously to José. "You aren't getting anywhere. Cut loose from Rufo—now is the chance to get right."

"I won't run out because of bad weather," said José, staunchly. "And he'll come back into his own."

A few days later, José came in all excited again. He had almost lost his life.

Riding in from Tacubaya in one of Rufo's autos, the car had been riddled with bullets and the chauffeur instantly killed. The machine, traveling at a high rate of speed, swerved into a ditch and turned turtle.

By a miracle, José had crawled out unhurt.

"Of course," he remarked, "the assailants were trying to get Rufo, not me."

David, more and more drawn into politics, began working day and night on a new national federation to take in the peasants' league and the labor syndicates to supplant entirely Rufo's Association and Morones' CROM, now so out of favor with the new Portes Gil provisional government.

José was bitter about this, and the unpleasant feeling—glossed over when David got José released—revived.

The new Federation apparently had the blessings of the new government, but Esperanza was afraid that authorities were merely using it as a catspaw to break up the old labor groups. David did not deny the possibility.

"But we have to do what we can," he argued, "otherwise everything will be gone. If we can get a good foothold, we'll be strong enough so the government won't dare smash us up."

Esperanza frequently went to the sessions. One of the most enthusiastic of the new leaders was their old friend Caraveo de la Valle, who had returned from an expedition to Cuba where he had barely escaped being executed by the Machado tyranny. He was a marvelous orator and had a winning personality, plus no end of nonchalant courage.

He and Mercedes (the two had become more intimate than ever since his return), David and Esperanza frequently went down to the Café of Cartoons, where sometimes they ran into a few of the old crowd, but more frequently to a little Chinese restaurant near headquarters, where they talked over plans and tactics.

Esperanza liked Caraveo more and more. Attractive as he had always seemed, she had at first thought him a trifle flamboyant, exalted and emotionally unstable. These traits she discovered to be merely typical Cuban veneer; actually he was a studious, intense chap with unshakable will and capacity for self-sacrifice. He had come from a wealthy sugar-plantation family, which had piled up a fortune during Cuba's "Dance of the Millions," but he had thrown aside every opportunity and material comfort, had broken with his family and had risked his life twice in an effort to destroy the Machado tyranny in his country and free it from "the deadly yoke of American imperialism."

Now, he was also interested in the Federation, even though

his efforts in its behalf might jeopardize his right of asylum in Mexico.

For soon Esperanza's prediction had turned true. The authorities having found that the Federation was a bona fide labor group, not a political gag, had turned against the organization as they had against Rufo's Association and all other forms of popular expression. Portes Gil, apparently bent on becoming a real dictator, had suppressed nearly everything except the official National Revolutionary Party he had founded, and which he sustained by forced contributions from government employees—a perfect Fascist set-up, and as David described it, "Neither 'National' nor 'revolutionary' nor a 'party.'" With the prospect of persecution ahead for the Federation, Esperanza was more and more worried lest something happen to David.

And more and more, they both worried about Caraveo. The Cuban exiles had started a magazine in opposition to the Machado tyranny, and were very active in arousing sentiment against the régime on the island. Caraveo was the spear head of this effort.

He had been warned numbers of times that his government was sending assassins to get him.

He always laughed the idea off as fantastic.

"I don't like the looks of things," David told him. "I'm getting suspicious of the good faith of the authorities here. Now that they are less friendly to the Federation, they won't have any love for one of its outstanding leaders, especially if he's a foreigner.

"And you've noticed the Machado tyranny in Cuba has invited dozens of Mexican officials, including our Chief of Police Maceo, over to the island at Cuba's expense and has given them decorations, banquets and honors. Tin medals turn men's heads. The Cuban authorities are doing all this precisely to get their hands on the Cuban exiles here, or at least to influence the Mexican government not to give them asylum. Machado would spend any amount to get you out of the way."

"In Cuba perhaps, but not here. We have been given official promises that we have a refuge here undisturbed. We don't need to worry, at least not yet."

"There's another thing, too," persisted David. "Chief of Police Maceo used to be very close to Rufo. He switched over to get in the good graces of the present administration, but he's a two-

faced rat of a man who might well be taking orders from an old friend also."

"Maybe," replied Caraveo, "but we don't have to hunt for anything too far fetched in this. I don't believe there's anything to worry about."

But one night when they were all four in the Chinese joint, another Cuban, Leander Arbusto, came up to their table, glanced sharply at the others, and asked to speak to Caraveo alone. Arbusto was a slim rat-faced sleek type whom Esperanza immediately loathed.

"These people I'm with are all right," replied Caraveo. "What is it? Shoot."

"You must watch your step. We have word that two assassins are here to get you. One slept last night in the Embassy. Watch out, for God's sake."

The man spoke these words swiftly, his eyes darting about, his hands trembling.

Caraveo just laughed. "O. K. Thanks."

With a contemptuous glance on his face, Caraveo watched the fellow go out.

"What an unpleasant person!" remarked Esperanza. "He gave me the creeps."

"You're right," snapped Caraveo. "We don't trust him at all. He's supposed to be an exile, but he's always affluent, plenty of money. No one knows where he gets it. I don't take much stock in his warning."

Esperanza was thoughtful. "Do be careful. A warning is a warning. Mercedes, you make him look out for himself. That fellow may be telling the truth to get into the good graces of the rest of you."

David added a further word of caution but Caraveo was gaily indifferent.

They all walked together to the cable office and there parted company.

About an hour later when David and Esperanza got home, they found a message scribbled on the back of an envelope addressed to Tirso Bardo.

"Caraveo has been shot. Come to the Red Cross hospital on San Jerónimo street."

"My God! My God!" cried Esperanza. "This is terrible!"

David crumpled the envelope in his hand. His face set.

"He should have been careful. I'll bet Maceo is in on this."

They rushed over to the hospital in a taxi.

A large group of friends were crowded in the patio waiting anxiously for news of Caraveo's condition.

David knew one of the interns and after some argument, he and Esperanza were admitted to the operating room.

As David started upstairs Tirso Bardo caught him by the arm. "Give me the low down for my paper as soon as you can."

Stench of medicines. White glare. Strong lights flooded the table. Caraveo was unconscious. His skin looked ash-pale. The room was crowded with doctors and interns in white. One was giving the Cuban an injection.

Mercedes and Julia were there. Tears poured down Mercedes face. She shook with sobs.

Julia kept her arms about her. The thick lenses of her glasses were blurred with tears.

They hung on every act and facial expression of the doctors.

In low whispers, Julia told what had happened. After leaving the cable office, Caraveo and Mercedes had walked down Juárez avenue and turned into Arquitectos street. As they passed along the high wall of a lumber yard, shots rang out.

Caraveo dashed across the street, zig-zagging, then plunged headlong on the opposite pavement.

Mercedes rushed after him, knelt down and caught up his head. He muttered, "The tyrant murdered me," then lost consciousness.

Caraveo's arm had been smashed. One bullet, entering at the elbow—he had been supporting Mercedes arm—and smashed the bones of the forearm. It was a miracle Mercedes hadn't been shot, too. Another bullet had passed near his heart.

He had lost much blood. His smashed forearm, lying on the white sheets heavily bandaged, would have to be amputated.

The operation room was hushed. The white glare made the whole shocking scene seem unreal.

The doctors consulted frequently in low whispers. Every few minutes a young intern took the patient's pulse. He uttered an exclamation.

Two doctors leaned over Caraveo.

Another injection. He was sinking fast.

Suddenly Esperanza realized, from the doctors' manner, that all was hopeless. She felt an icy sickness over her body. She remembered vividly how Luis had been shot and killed.

Mercedes' fingers were crushed in fear and horror to her colorless lips—she was such a sensitive, high-strung girl.

Again Esperanza's eyes strayed to Caraveo, his fluffy, dark brown hair, his fine, strong features. She saw with horror that the little color left in his skin was slowly vanishing. She could detect no movement of breathing.

One intern kept his finger constantly on Caraveo's pulse.

Bit by bit life ebbed away. Caraveo's eyes never opened. He did not have a spark of vitality left to fight the inevitable. He passed away without even a quiver, just a slow stiffening.

Mercedes screamed.

At that moment the intern dropped Caraveo's wrist and quietly lifted the sheet over his face.

Mercedes' scream faded into sobs—steady, loud weeping. Julia held her tightly in her arms and her own tears fell on Mercedes' bowed head. Esperanza also began to weep.

Another friend came in, Fernando, the one-legged painter.

"My God, he's dead!" he exclaimed. "They told me downstairs that he was alive and improving. My God!"

He glared around at them through his thick glasses, then leaned over the victim.

The intern drew down the sheet for him to look, then pulled it back.

Fernando straightened up. "This is a crime. This —"

David took his arm grimly. "He's not the first victim, nor the last. The turn of each and every one of us is likely to come before all this is over."

"But this was the Cuban government—" began Fernando.

David nodded bitterly, then lowered his voice. "And maybe our government as well. We shall see what the authorities do to trace the assassins. Their attitude will reveal a lot. Do you think the Cubans would have dared send assassins here without official guarantees? There's something rotten in Denmark."

David caressed Mercedes consolingly on the arm, and he and Julia helped her from the room.

In the courtyard everyone crowded about, asking anxiously for news. Tirso Bardo caught his arm.

"Come along with us," said David, "and I'll tell you everything."

Those standing near realized what had happened.

"He's dead," ran in an agitated ripple through the throng, back

and forth and round and round and finally rose to a loud cry of dismay and anger.

LIX

Caraveo's body lay under its drape of flags and flowers in state in the Federation headquarters. Esperanza took her turn in the mourning guard of honor. Hundreds filed past the body. There were speeches. Tirso Bardo was there, taking notes.

At noon five thousand people gathered for the funeral procession.

Amid a jam, the coffin was carried downstairs—David acted as one of the pallbearers—and placed on the hearse.

The procession would pass through the Zócalo. There, in front of the red-stone Palace, David, Clemente and other leaders talked.

At the University Law School, where other Cuban exiles were studying, because Machado had closed down their own university, more talks were given.

The procession returned through the Zócalo and down Madero avenue, the main business thoroughfare.

David was to give a third speech in front of the American consulate, because of American support to the Machado tyranny.

But as the marchers approached Revillagigedo street, just below the marble Juárez monument, where Luis had been killed, heavy streams of water from fire hoses plowed into them.

The driver of the hearse was bowled off his seat. Marchers were knocked down or tossed about. Others doubled up, arms crossed over face or stomach, trying to protect themselves from the terrific impact.

Esperanza and David, just behind the coffin, got the full force of the water. Esperanza, struck in the side, was flung half across the street and fell sprawling, skinning her hands and knees, tearing her stockings. There was no standing up against those heavy streams.

As the water swept in another direction, she got up, but saw David nowhere.

She dashed for the curb on the business side of the street.

Others were running across the Alameda lawns.

Firemen with picks were chasing the fleeing figures, dealing heavy blows. A man struck on the skull threw up his arms with a scream. Three persons, she later learned, were killed.

The police closed in and made wholesale arrests.

Esperanza, hit again by the water, staggered, but reaching the curb, she flattened herself against a building.

Knowing David's fearlessness, she feared he might be arrested. If so her own liberty was important so as to aid him.

She slipped around into Luis Moya street to safety.

Where was Mercedes? She had been in the procession, too.

Esperanza looked back. The flag-draped hearse stood solitary in the center of the flooded avenue, the coffin dripping with water.

Then she saw—Bobo, sprawled in the middle of the car tracks. She ran toward him.

But he jumped up and scampered toward the Alameda.

Hop-skipping across the curb, he jumped astride the marble statue of a nude woman, chained on her hands and knees, head bowed.

He gave a "Whooeee!" that rang for blocks, then sat there nonchalantly watching the fracas.

Esperanza, soaked from head to foot, went on home.

David came in several hours later. He had been looking around madly for her.

Now there were three more to be buried. A larger funeral demonstration was planned as a protest at the breaking up of Caraveo's funeral.

"I told you," David said, "that there was something rotten in Caraveo's assassination. The officials are trying to cover up by taking it out on our hides."

Before the new funeral could be held, David and twenty others were illegally seized by the military commandant, General César Ortega, a brutal drunkard and marihuana smoker, famous for his thefts of cattle during the revolution, his cruelties, and his foul murders of prisoners.

Esperanza hastened to take blankets and food to David in the barracks.

She passed the pacing sentry at the big door into a corridor lined with gun racks and soldiers lounging on benches.

The officer of the guard came out, buttoning on his sword, an ill-mannered, broad-faced Indian.

Orders prevented him from letting her see David, but he took her up to General Ortega.

The General, a sandy haired, blue-eyed, youngish man, son of a blond Spaniard and a shady American border girl, was surly.

His blouse was unbuttoned, revealing a grimy undershirt, and he needed a shave; but at this particular moment, though his eyes were bloodshot, he was not filled with marihuana or booze, so was slightly reasonable.

He leered at her. Laying his big hands on the desk, he quizzed her as to her relation with David, why she had brought food and blankets.

"You're a good-looking wench," he said, curling his lips. "I ought to throw you in with the rest of the bastards though."

But he wrote out a pass. "You can see him whenever you wish, and he can have food and blankets."

"How long will he be in?" asked Esperanza.

"Good and long, my pigeon." He gave a loud spat in the general direction of a tall, brass spittoon.

"He is a painter. Can I bring him canvas and paints?"

"Good God!" exploded the general. "This isn't an art studio—All right —"

He lifted a paper, rustled it, nervously, let it drop, and turned away, after another leer at her.

She went downstairs. David was brought out from a big, iron-barred room near the barracks entrance.

At sight of him everything else was unreal. Through her dimmed eyes, she saw only the gleam of his brown-white throat, rising like a strong column from his open flannel shirt.

With a happy laugh, he seized her in his strong arms and kissed her.

He was unshaven, his eyes red from lack of sleep. "Bed-bugs," he announced cheerily.

He was worried about her. "Lord, we haven't any ready money except your savings. What shall we do?"

She did not tell him that that very morning she had been abruptly dismissed from the Bureau of Indigenous Culture.

"Don't worry," she told him, "I'll get along." She said she had gotten permission to bring him canvas and paints.

"Magnificent!" he cried. "I'll set to work right away. Take what canvases I have down to Julia Patterson to sell. She'll help all she can."

Esperanza left.

The guard was being changed, with a shuffle of shoes, the slapping, half-metallic noise of men presenting arms, the bumps

of gun butts on the cement, another shuffle when the retired detail marched in with a muttered, "ump—ump—ump—ump."

All power was like that, just a brutal, pig-like "ump—ump—ump—ump —"

Going to the studio, closed now for a long time, Esperanza found it thick with dust.

She cleaned it, pausing at times to recall the moments of joy there, the happiest moments of her whole life—all the details of their days together, how their love had begun and expanded and taken firm root.

Suddenly she stepped back from a canvas she had never seen.

It was of Lola Tabor. How well he had caught her flippant arrogance, hoyden humor, and passionate fury.

"Anyway, she's not in the nude," thought Esperanza. "But David might at least have told me about it."

This put an end to her reminiscing.

Selecting a dozen of his best canvases, she loaded them into a taxi and took them down to Julia's store.

Julia was terrifically upset by David's arrest. She promised to try to sell something right away.

Esperanza kept out three good canvases which she thought she might be able to dispose of to former clients and friends.

She went to Caldwell's house and explained the situation.

Caldwell growled. "For you I'd do anything, but David Muñoz ought to be locked up for good. He's a trouble-maker."

Esperanza avoided arguing, merely remarking that he had been illegally seized by the military on no charges.

"And I'll be darned if I fall for his painting either," continued Caldwell. "Why some of his figures there in the Institute haven't any elbows; their arms go around just like the tentacles of a devil-fish. Some of the buildings look cock-eyed, no perspective. How come?"

Esperanza explained as David had explained to her. "The painter, since the invention of the kodak, has been liberated from childish realism and recording. There is no significance in copying a milk jug exactly when a kodak can do a better job—a silly conception to demand faithful unimaginative reproduction. One doesn't demand such boredom from a writer. The artist has to go beyond photography—not reality but the illusion of super-reality. Suppose you want to give an idea of what the milk jug looks like all twenty-four hours of the day —"

"That's why painters have to keep such irregular hours, I suppose," joked Caldwell. "Fortunately we bankers don't have to sit up nights to find out what a dollar looks like."

"You keep them carefully locked up," retorted Esperanza, "at least your own."

Caldwell slapped the back of one hand against the palm of the other and laughed.

"Take this picture here," continued Esperanza. "David has deliberately suppressed irrelevant details to capture the single forceful impression of a group of men rhythmically cutting sugar cane."

"Why, of course!" exclaimed Mrs. Caldwell. "It's really very beautiful, the color and all. Do you like it, Ida?"

"I think it's fine."

"Two against one." Caldwell laughed. He paid Esperanza seventy-five pesos for it.

A godsend. She could splurge a bit and buy good food for David—the barracks fare was slops and cockroaches.

Julia Patterson also came to her aid by employing her to go out with her to various Indian villages to buy handicrafts for her shop.

Another shock came for them all. Mercedes was arrested, charged with being an accomplice of those who murdered Caraveo.

The thing was a fantastic police frame-up. The police were obviously trying to shield the real culprits.

Leander Arbusto, the shifty Cuban who had tipped them off about the impending assassination, was quizzed only briefly by the police; then promptly released. No leads were followed up.

"A vile plot," raged Julia, her curly blonde hair sticking up in all directions. "They can't get away with holding Mercedes."

"And just who will stop them?" asked Esperanza.

"I'm going down to that Chief of Police and give him a piece of my mind. I'll get others to go with me —"

The Federation was busy on all the cases, their determination and courage heightened by the aggressions of the Portes Gil government. They discovered the real mystery of Arbusto. A shady underworld character, he derived his income—this had so puzzled the Cubans—from two very elegant houses of prostitution, protected by Chief of Police Maceo. Arbusto, in fact, was a very close friend of Maceo.

It was very probable, some reasoned, that Maceo must have known of the impending assassination, that David's hunch was not far wrong.

These facts were published. Tirso Bardo slipped some of them into his paper, risking his job. Maceo, to make a pretense of impartiality was obliged to call Arbusto in for further questioning.

But instead of seeking for the real culprits, the police still kept Mercedes in jail and put her through terrible third-degree questioning. Her lawyer was allowed to see her only once for ten minutes.

The police sought to besmirch Mercedes' name to build up public hostility against her. An independent, modern woman, who had had an unusual and somewhat tragic life of which she talked freely, it was easy to put out twisted press versions to make her out a monster.

Her friends worked hard. The Federation found out that two Cubans—one known to have been in the Havana secret police and another with a prison record and pardoned by Machado—had flown from Tampico the week before the assassination. One, it was claimed, actually stayed at the Embassy the night before the killing.

Both had flown back to Tampico the morning after the assassination and two days later had taken a boat to Cuba. The police, if they had shown the slightest initiative, could have arrested them at the airport before they left the city.

The Federation demanded the extradition of the two supposed assassins. The government took no steps, and all the facts were hushed up.

Julia and her friends, when they called on Chief of Police Maceo, were merely insulted, but several Mexican delegations were clapped into jail. It was plain that Maceo intended to railroad Mercedes.

Esperanza, frantic for both her and David, again sought out the Caldwells, for they knew Mercedes fairly well from her photographic work.

Would Caldwell protest to the Chief of Police?

"A nice mess you want to get me into," he said.

But for some reason, he liked the idea. "This Mercedes is quite a girl, isn't she?" He smacked his lips, which angered Esperanza. "Sure I'll go."

"Is it wise?" cautioned Mrs. Caldwell.

"Yes," he replied curtly. "I've another little bone to pick with Maceo. Our bank, through private detectives, had two forgers arrested. But we couldn't get them to trial, though the evidence had them cold to rights. They were released. We have pretty good evidence that they bribed Maceo fifty thousand pesos to get out. The more cards I have up my sleeve on him—the better."

He suggested that Esperanza go with him as his secretary. "I want a witness."

As Caldwell had provided himself with a note from the President of Congress, the Chief of Police received them at once—a thin, snarling little man, his upper lip drawn in and wrinkled like a nasty-tempered dog's.

To such men you come with your stick in hand, or you are bitten. Caldwell, without preliminary, boomed out that Maceo was making himself ridiculous by persecuting Mercedes.

Maceo drew back growling into the gates of his authority. He blustered in the way characteristic of ignorant police officials, and said, astonishingly:

"Look here, you can't buy me!"

"Are you so sure?" sneered Caldwell.

Maceo's beady eyes glittered.

Caldwell could be impressive. Now his voice cut like a knife slowly gouging: "Suppose, instead of this poor Italian girl, you had two forgers with plenty of money."

Maceo turned livid. He winced. The blade had struck a vital spot. But he still blustered. "Look here, I won't stand for that sort of talk—not in my office."

But he made no move to do anything, and behind his braggadocio was now perplexity.

Caldwell leaned back and lit a cigar. Calmly, now, he presented the facts about Mercedes, pointing out the dirty maneuvers of the police department; then added sternly, when Maceo seemed about to snap again:

"By the way. I'm from the Mexico City Trust Bank—President in fact."

A quiver passed over Maceo. He dropped bellyward. "You should have told me in the first place."

But despite his sudden apparent cravenness, the lip was still drawn back, the teeth still slightly showing. But solicitously polite now, he assured Caldwell that Mercedes should have fair treatment "in accordance with the law."

Out in the street, Caldwell said to Esperanza, "Did you notice his tactics? Immediately he tried to put me in the position of doing something wrong, of desiring to bribe him. All he is really interested in, besides worrying rats for the sake of worrying them, is grafting. I'll warrant he's gotten money from Cuba to cover up this crime, or else—" he paused thoughtfully—"or else he's a cover-up man for someone higher up in the government, oh, very high up indeed."

"Maceo was once an agent of Rufo Montalván of the Association of —"

Caldwell stopped short. "Say, that's an idea. Well, whoever he's working for, and he's crooked enough to have any number of masters' voices, we'll make it hot for him."

Sure enough, within a week Maceo was removed and a successor appointed. But still Mercedes languished in jail.

Shortly after, though, a Mexican girl appeared at the police station badly beaten up. She had been living with one Ernesto Treviño, a Cuban friend of Arbusto. Treviño had maltreated her, then had run off with another woman. The plot to murder Caraveo, she declared, had been fabricated in their apartment. Arbusto had been present. The two assassins had fled to Cuba.

Treviño could not be located, but since the story had gotten into the press, Arbusto had to be arrested by the new Chief of Police.

But shortly Arbusto disappeared. The Federation learned that he had been secretly released and given a large sum of money to leave the country at once.

In hand bills the Federation again published the facts about Arbusto, his relations with the police, his illicit houses. Tirso Bardo again got in several good little notices.

The police closed up the houses and ordered the deportation of the foreign women in them. Among the names listed, Esperanza came upon that of Henriette Cheval. She actually had charge of one of the houses.

Shortly after, Mercedes was released. Dust was thrown over the whole case. The newspapers were given official orders not to mention it.

The weeks sped by. The offices of the Federation were closed by the police. David and the others were still held illegally in the barracks.

A big demonstration of university students demanded the re-

lease of those arrested. Watching it before it was broken up by the police, once more Esperanza caught a glimpse of Bobo as he disappeared in the mêlée.

David so filled her thoughts, she had not time really to look for the dwarf. She was seeing officials high and low.

Finally she found a judge who would serve civil habeus corpus on General Ortega for false arrest and kidnapping. The General tore up the habeus corpus and laughed.

If the Federation was being persecuted, so were all other peasant and labor organizations.

Rufo's position was getting hopeless. So was José's.

José rushed to the apartment. "It's good-bye, Esperanza. Rufo's going off to Vera Cruz to fight it out."

Esperanza shook her head sadly. "Rufo fight? Never. Once I told you that if I were a man I would go with you. But not this time, José. You're all wrong. Rufo's got maneuvered on to the wrong side. President Portes Gil may be a demagogue; he's smashing up every democratic expression, but the wrong crowd is behind this revolt. It will solve nothing. Even if successful it would only make things worse. What business has Rufo or you to help pull the chestnuts of the old landowners and the Church out of the fire? Just Rufo's personal ambition. He's pushing his followers on into ruin."

José said gruffly he couldn't abandon his friends when things were going badly.

"How about Adelita?" asked Esperanza.

"For the time being she's going back to her family in Milpa Verde."

"She's always welcome here, of course."

"She'd rather go there—thanks."

He kissed Esperanza good-bye tenderly.

"Watch yourself, José," she said, in final counsel. "Be careful; and please, don't trust Rufo too far. You'll get sniped at; he won't."

She continued taking food to David.

He was painting all the time. Everything he did improved.

Julia had sold four of his canvases at very good prices, and Mrs. Caldwell had bought a second one, so there was no immediate economic worry.

Mercedes was suddenly rearrested, this time for deportation. Through the efforts of friends, her deportation to Italy, where

she would have been persecuted by the Fascist government, was stayed, and she was finally allowed to choose her own destination.

Late one afternoon, Esperanza learned that she was being taken, under guard, on the seven o'clock Vera Cruz train, to be embarked on a Dutch boat for Bremenhaven.

Esperanza rushed home to leave some books that Julia had loaned her and was just dashing out to take a taxi to the station when Rosa stopped her.

"Mother, you rush around so much these days, I just don't get a chance to say a word to you," she wailed.

"Sweet thing, what is it?" asked Esperanza, tucking in a lock under Rosa's hat. "You look lovely in that little hat. Come along with me now. Mercedes is being taken off tonight. I thought you were having your music lesson."

"I changed the hour. I just had to talk to you."

"Nothing wrong, my child?"

She turned a starry face to her mother. "Quite the opposite."

In the taxicab, Rosa toyed with a button on Esperanza's sleeve. "It's this, Rafael and I want to get married."

"Oh, you dear!" cried Esperanza, happily, and hugged her. "Tell me all about it."

"He's awfully nice, mother, and —"

"He's not nice, he's grand. I'd marry him myself if I didn't have David."

"Huh, if he'd have you. Although," she said seriously, "he could do a lot worse."

Esperanza kissed her on the cheek. "He's got the finest girl in the whole, wild world."

They reached the station.

Esperanza hurried to buy platform tickets, and they pushed through the throngs.

They found Mercedes already in second class with a stolid soldier beside her.

Esperanza barely had time to kiss her good-bye, give her a book to read, and jump off the train.

Mercedes waved to them cheerfully from the window. "Except for you and one or two others," she called. "I'm really glad to go."

The train pulled out.

"Poor woman," said Rosa, unhappily.

"Yes. I guess she is really glad to get away since Caraveo was

killed and all the unpleasant lying publicity. She couldn't leave voluntarily as it would look as though she were running away. Still, it's sad. How would you, Rosa, like to be sent off without money to some land where you didn't even speak the language?"

Rosa shuddered. "I've never had to worry much about things, have I, mother? I don't know what I'd do without you and David, and —"

"And Rafael, of course." Esperanza smiled.

"No, I was thinking of poor David locked up."

"Let's walk," suggested Esperanza.

They set off arm in arm, a cool, crisp evening.

"Of course," Rosa said, "we wouldn't think of getting married—though Rafael wants to very soon—unless David can be at the wedding."

"God knows when that will be, child."

News of new armed revolt made the future possibility for David's release look even darker.

And José was mixed up in the coming revolt. Where was he?

More and more drug-addict Ortega ruled supreme in the capital. He made wholesale arrests. The city was terrorized. Political opponents were secretly taken out and shot on the road to Cuernavaca.

Esperanza was frantic for David. Being a well-known artist and leader, he was safer; his disappearance would cause much scandal, but that would be little satisfaction if he were killed. And the drug-addict was running riot with his murderous instincts.

The long-pending revolt burst—a queer combination of disaffected generals, clerics, landlords and labor elements. For days the pavements of Mexico City rang with cavalry going to entrain for the front.

This revolt seemed to destroy all chances of David's prompt release. It increased the danger of his being summarily shot.

And where was José?

LX

The revolt was put down swiftly with the aid of behind-the-scenes dictator, Calles. The proper number of executions punctuated it.

But David still languished in the barracks.

Esperanza at last received assurances that as soon as the new

President, Ortiz Rubio, was inaugurated, David would be released.

But coming out of the Palace, right after inauguration, Ortiz Rubio was shot in the jaw. He had a long fight for recovery.

This gave drug-addict Ortega another chance to terrorize the city. If he were allowed much more rope there would be another Huerta treachery.

But the new President gradually recovered and resumed the reins of his authority. He was anxious to conciliate all the factions. In time of trouble, governments seek new friends and allies. And so, very unexpectedly David and the others were released.

A few days later David was called to the Palace. An apology was tendered him for the treatment accorded him by the previous administration. He was assured that in several weeks General Ortega would be removed, and in fact presently he was sent off to Tabasco to vent his irresponsible brutalities on that unfortunate commonwealth. The Federation, David was told, should wholeheartedly support the government against reaction.

David came back from his interview half amused, half furious. "Damn demagogues!" he exclaimed. "Of course, for the present we must support the government, the better of two evils, and they know it. But they'll have us in jail again as soon as it suits them."

What a confused mess, thought Esperanza, the whole political situation had become. Words, fights, words, promises by the government, and the people starved worse than ever. Out of it all the people had gotten many new rights and opportunities, but progress it seemed was largely a confused, blundering accident.

But David's release lifted a great load off Esperanza's heart.

Bobo showed up at the apartment. He danced around happily and insisted they must celebrate. He volunteered to bring his orchestra.

They had all their old friends in: Julia, Marta and Toño, Tirso Bardo, Dr. Chávez, the painters, Rafael, school friends of Rosa, and it seemed like old days. Marta, Esperanza decided, wouldn't ever marry either Toño or Chávez. She had succeeded in making them all good friends, and now one, then the other, took her out.

A happy reunion. If only Caraveo and Mercedes could have been there! And José!

Soon David got a contract to paint the Bordán Palace in Cuernavaca. The government evidently really wished to conciliate him.

Esperanza accompanied him to Cuernavaca when he went to look over the ground and get dimensions and make plans.

The town was a delightful bower of lazy green. The balmy air was a soft caress. Through the streets ran eternally gurgling mountain streams. Often Esperanza would wake in the dead of night and hear that ceaseless sweet song of the water.

The stately portico where he would paint looked out upon huts smothered in fruit trees—mangos, avocados, chirimoyas. The garden glistened with red berries, white floripondios and scarlet trumpets. Beyond was a far sweep of bluish brown valley rising to the ribbed mountains around Tepoztlán. Far beyond and above towered the white volcanoes.

David set to work making his preliminary sketches. Soon he became enthusiastic and absorbed.

They rented a little house and orchard near the Borda gardens, and Esperanza settled contentedly into the simple life of the place. She kept house with the aid of an Indian servant, went to market on the crest of the hill, read a good deal, continued her English lessons, took long walks with David, to the ruins, the cascades, the neighboring villages, to the old villa of Empress Carlota.

Soon after they came down, Rosa and Rafael were married by a simple civil ceremony.

"I have a good hand," said the plump, little brown judge, as he ended the ceremony. "No one I've married has ever gotten a divorce."

Esperanza's feelings nearly mastered her. Rosa looked so sweet and ecstatic. The girl did not know that she represented a terrible tragedy in her mother's life. For her, Luis had been her father. Now, as Esperanza saw her so happy with Rafael, so assured of life and of a fair share of life's good things, her own early tragedy, softened by the years, was reduced to a passing incident in the sum total of all her experiences and seemed at last compensated for. The darkest moment had given birth to this—her happiest and brightest moment.

They had a jolly dinner at the new Marik Apartments on the tiled terrace overlooking the valley and the snow volcanoes, and the two newlyweds motored off that same night for Mexico City.

Esperanza was happy to have David out of politics for a time. But he was never entirely out. He was too involved in the activities of the Federation to drop everything. And he resented the implication that the government had bought him off or that by

jailing him it had frightened him from doing organization work or playing an outstanding part. He had a reputation for leadership he could not easily toss aside.

Frequently he was called to Mexico City. Sometimes Esperanza accompanied him, but mostly she stayed in Cuernavaca.

Those trips over the lonely road and his activities alone in Mexico City filled her with forebodings. Rufo, for the moment, was not a menace, but the memory of what had happened to Caraveo, and David's own danger at the hands of drug-addict Ortega were still too vivid.

In Cuernavaca they met a whole new set of people, mostly well-to-do, for David was now accepted everywhere as a remarkable painter. Esperanza was nettled by sighing females, especially Americans, who fawned over him. Once—David was high up on the scaffolding, painting—Esperanza, leaning over the portico balustrade, saw an American girl actually kiss David's leather jacket which was lying on a post. It made her doubly furious because she knew that Americans—except for such people as Julia and to some extent the Caldwells, despised the Mexicans. Again she had that feeling that Americans were brittle, mechanical automats, people who did not use their brains to think, to know or enjoy life, but merely to get on in the world in a material way.

Mrs. Caldwell and Ida moved down to the Borda gardens to live. Mr. Caldwell joined them week-ends.

Mrs. Caldwell frequently came over to see Esperanza, and on Sunday afternoons, the Caldwells nearly always invited her and David to tea at the gardens, a beautiful, half-dilapidated stretch of terraces, walks and giant trees, the ground lush with fallen mangos and the growth glowing with red coffee-berries. Stone steps and curving paths led down to pools where duck and black swans drifted about lazily.

Esperanza now liked Mrs. Caldwell much better. The woman, in her pressed-flower way, was very good-hearted and was always doing nice things. Caldwell, harder than ever, but outwardly more jovial and moralistic, contented with himself, convinced of his success and importance in the world, was still full of energy, despite the chronic pouches under his eyes and his flaccid jaw muscles.

Winifred, he told Esperanza, was entering on her third year of university work. He glowed whenever he mentioned her.

When the weather was very cold in Mexico City, Julia frequently visited them. She came down one day in November.

She stretched herself like a plump kitten. "It's glorious here, so warm and easy going. Lordy, I'm going to sleep a thousand years."

They took her over to the new country club for a cocktail before lunch. It was nice, the view from the terrace—the long stretch of sugar-cane valley reaching toward Ixtla.

Nearby was the new country home—a typical Beverly Hills residence—of the great "First Chief of the Revolution," Plutarco Elías Calles, still the box-faced Armenian dictator of the country. Other so-called revolutionaries, grown wealthy, were building mansions alongside.

David, who had lost all respect for Calles since the mine strike and since the pacts with Morrow, dubbed the avenue of palatial homes, the Avenue of Ali Baba and his Forty Thieves.

They joined the Caldwells at tea in the Borda gardens.

The latest scandal in Mexico, Julia told them, was the opening of the new luxurious Monte Carlo gambling club, in flagrant violation of the law. The highest officials of the realm, including Rufo, were said to have a stake in it.

"Rufo!" exclaimed Esperanza. "But he was mixed up in the revolt!"

"Hadn't you heard?" asked David. "When he saw the revolt was a flop, he declared publicly he had had nothing whatever to do with it. He has evidently made secret deals with the government. Anyway he's back in Mexico City and no one bothers him. Already he has his hand in everything, but so far, mostly in business deals."

And José, thought Esperanza, was still missing. Adelita had written her frantically three or four times to ask if she had heard anything of him.

Now Esperanza voiced her fears for José. "I'm afraid, David—" But she broke off quickly. "What about this Monte Carlo Club?"

"They already call it 'the monument to the Revolution,'" said David, laughing sourly.

"Anyway," said Caldwell, easily, "it's a sign there's money about and that Mexico is settling down."

He went on to eulogize Calles. "He's a great man. If he loses his grip, things will crash."

"The age-old excuse for setting up tyrants," retorted David.

"He's betrayed the revolution. He's grown fabulously wealthy as has all the gang around him, a gang of politicians and generals who merely talk social reforms in order to feather their nests. Look at Rufo. Look at the way they flaunt their mistresses around in public. This new Monte Carlo Club is merely one symptom of the general corruption."

Caldwell shrugged. "What of it? It's in the blood. All I know is that it's easy to make money these days. The people seem content. Things are moving. Business is better. There's order in the country."

"It's just a fever flush," argued David. "If this keeps up, there will be serious trouble ahead. The peasants will pull their guns out of the thatched roofs again. The trouble with you business men, you think of everything in terms of your own interests and then imagine they are identical with those of the country."

"Maybe," drawled Caldwell. "But give me thirty years of Porfirio Díaz' peace any time," said Caldwell. "I think Calles is a good thing for the country."

"He has to go," decreed David. "He has corrupted the whole movement that produced him. The real revolution which stood for lands for the peasants, education, rights of the people has to continue. If Calles keeps on betraying these things, then more violence will occur."

Caldwell lit a cigar and said with a slight sneer. "Lands for peasants that don't know how to use them and mostly won't. You are very idealistic. The main thing is that Mexico stays orderly and gives a chance to American capital."

David laughed. "I have no hope of convincing you. Please don't take offense, but most of us don't want your dirty dollars or the system that goes with them."

Caldwell spoke in a fatherly, condescending tone. "My boy, the system you criticize has built up a great country. You could learn a lot from us."

"Your system was good for its day. Every system has its best day. Now it has grown foul. Certainly down here, we don't want your worn-out shoes."

Caldwell smiled. "Well, friends, so long as I can enjoy this nice Cuernavaca sunshine, you aren't going to get me excited about anything. Unfortunately I fear our stay in Mexico will be short. I rather expect to be appointed to the United States Treasury Department, in which case we'll have to live in Washington."

They all expressed congratulations and regrets.

After they had separated, David said to Esperanza and Julia: "Did you hear that Caldwell also had a bank in Tampico that cracked up? But he doesn't get any poorer."

"But, my dear boy," drawled Julia, "having had two bank failures and feathered his nest thereby, he is eminently qualified to help out the American treasury and hold high office, and be a spokesman for the great American culture."

"And they call us Mexicans 'grafters'!" He laughed. "Come, let's have supper and then go to the band concert."

They ate at the Marik Apartments, then went on to the plaza. The place was a balmy dream, the air a soft caress.

The band played every Thursday, Saturday and Sunday nights. The little square of trees, with its red gravel walks and neat flower beds bordered by elaborate white shell designs, was always jammed with promenading white-clad Indians, quiet folk, each with his long work machete dangling by his side, scarlet sarape over the shoulder.

Here had been the very cradle of the agrarian movement. Here Zapata had long ruled supreme. But it was hard now, except when one passed the blackened ruins of some formerly prosperous sugar estate, to feel that this had once been a stronghold of war, and that a flame of destruction had once ringed this town about, that these same mild, white-clad peasants had once been furiously battling for lands.

In most of this state they had gotten lands, though now, at least in the environs of Cuernavaca, the rich politicians and generals of the revolution were busy taking them away again.

As the band played on and they promenaded, Esperanza was mostly silent. She was thinking: if Rufo is back that will make it more dangerous for David.

Julia returned to Mexico City. Life flowed on in Cuernavaca, month after month, interrupted for Esperanza only by David's ever more numerous trips to the city. Soon his frescoes would be finished. In a way Esperanza would be glad to leave the little town, for in the short time they had been there it had changed greatly.

The Beverly Hills section of wealthy generals and concessionaires was growing. The elegant gambling casino opened up, attracting hordes of unpleasant nouveaux riches. Cocottes lounged around

the terraces. The former peaceful beauty and charm of the place was being ruptured by the modern curse known as civilization.

Presently ground was broken for a new fashionable hotel at the head of the Ali Baba avenue. They learned that Rufo was behind the new enterprise.

Rufo, since his return to the city had expanded rapidly. He had already bought the high-class Ritz Plaza Hotel in Mexico City. He had become an inside concessionaire, blossoming out with business contracts for street paving, plus a monopoly on gravel and rock for public works. The Association was strong in the cement industry, and through strikes and other harassment he had bankrupted some of the smaller companies, then had gotten a law through allowing for the seizure of the plants by the workers on a basis of long-time payments, so that through a fake sort of cooperation he was now supplying the government with all its cement. He did all this more or less under cover, for he still posed as a great labor leader.

Already he had succeeded in worming himself into the official National Revolutionary Party, the political front of all this rotten corruption. He was becoming a real power again.

Rufo always got his man by hook or crook. He hated David and he hated the Federation, and the Federation, despite official hostility, was growing rapidly. Rufo had never forgiven David for the fresco or the Jalisco mine documents. More and more Esperanza feared something might happen to David.

LXI

Esperanza had to rush to Mexico City. Rosa was having a baby.

She had it. Dr. Chávez, as usual, brought it into the world. It was named Pedro.

This event, for the moment, overshadowed all else in the world. Scarcely liking to admit it, for it was not warranted by her years or appearance, Esperanza was a grandmother.

One night while she was in the city, José sneaked in, a hard twist on his scarred face, his blind eye wrinkled and drawn.

Esperanza wept with happiness and relief.

"Well," she said, "I told you Rufo wouldn't risk his skin."

José's good eye glittered. He cursed softly. "I heard he had come back here and is sitting pretty. He never went into the fight. He just egged us on, then lay low somewhere."

"He's practically double-crossed the Association," Esperanza

told him, "and now he's in with the official gang, feathering his nest."

José told her of the campaign, how they had been whipped before they got started, how he lay wounded in the shoulder with a fever in a little tropical Vera Cruz thatched village, expecting any moment to be dragged out and shot.

His shoulder refused to heal, kept running pus. He finally got it properly swabbed out in Puerto México. After a month there, he made a long horse-back trek through the mountains to Oaxaca City where he had worked in the nearby mines, not daring to send word to anyone. Now he had finally managed to risk sneaking back into the city.

"What are your plans?"

"I can't stick around here. They'd arrest me and shoot me. I'm going to the United States."

"And Adelita."

"Poor kid! I'll have her join me as soon as I find a job."

He left the following evening.

David came up a few days later, and that same night said:

"Put on your best bib and tucker and let's go out and see the famous gambling joint, the Monte Carlo."

They taxied out the Paseo and up to Chapultepec Heights, then to the right. Beyond the last houses, they dipped down through country lanes until presently bright lights shone across the fields.

They whirled through an impressive gate and up a long lane of waiting cars to the wide entrance, flooded with dazzling light, over which in flaming letters was:

MONTE CARLO CLUB

Strains of music came from within.

Self-consciously, her arm in David's, Esperanza walked past the haughty, uniformed employees into a lofty Babylonian foyer.

They checked their wraps and turned left to the gambling hall.

This was a vast vaulted room with flamboyant decorations. At the far end, for no reason any sane person could surmise, the ceiling was held up by a huge bas-relief white elephant.

From the elevated entrance, the hall below them, filled with tobacco smoke, was a sea of green felt tables, flashing roulette wheels, tumbling lottery and dice cages, white dress shirts, the splashes of color of evening gowns. The floor was jammed.

They made their way among the tables—roulette, faro, stud

poker, baccarat, dice, twenty-one, quinze, rouge et noire, chemin de fer—every table crowded with folk of every social category—poor, shabby workmen alongside of people in full dress. Respectable women, hard greedy expressions on their beauty-parlored faces, rubbed elbows with heavily rouged prostitutes, both in extreme décolleté.

"At least it's democratic," remarked David.

There was the eternal click of chips, the flash of bills, the glint of whirling wheel, till the silver ball dropped into a number and color.

Looking down the table, Esperanza watched the faces with mingled fascination and disgust. Women, who under ordinary circumstances probably had sweet and decent countenances, were converted into nervous harpies. A fat Jew sweated profusely. Beside him a man with a stately black beard, perhaps from one of the foreign legations, played nonchalantly, scattering his chips carelessly everywhere about the board.

David whistled. "Two thousand at a throw! It would take a workman, receiving the official minimum wage, nearly five years to earn that."

Fascinated, they watched the flash of chips for a long time. Smoke hung low over the tables.

"Want to have a try?" asked David.

"It's more fun watching."

"Look at the slim, handsome woman at the end," remarked David. "Notice how she runs her tongue along her lips to moisten them. Her throat is probably as dry as after a night of drinking. Note the dark circles under her eyes. Compared to the emotions that cause such a countenance, the vices of the flesh are noble. This is a cowardly evasion of life, a desire to live off the misfortunes of others, to get something for nothing. But the wheels are fixed, poor dupes."

They moved on into the bar, a lurid chromium steel and red leather place with glaring modernistic frescoes, gross nudes in Bacchic abandon in suggestive postures, with a special predilection for fat arched rears.

"What a commentary on the high society of our beloved City of Palaces," commented David. "Do you know that not only have there been killings here, but many suicides? It is hushed up. Since the officials of the government have a stake here, the newspapers have been forbidden to criticize the place."

They retraced their steps, recrossing the majestic entrance hall into the cabaret.

In a low voice, David said: "I came purposely tonight, not merely to see all this, but because the university students, who have been denouncing the place, are going to make a raid. There may be a little trouble."

Esperanza's eyes glittered. "I hope they smash it to bits."

They took a table in the cabaret where they could watch the floor show.

David pointed to the long French windows with their black relief figures of typical Mexican scenes.

"Those windows, though conventional, are really quite fine, the only decent and artistic things in the whole place."

Above on the wall over the orchestra was another huge fresco.

"That," remarked David, "is real art, a modern Titian."

A long limbed but big breasted nude woman with lascivious expression and pose was emerging like a twentieth century Aphrodite from violet plumes. She wore red gloves, nothing more.

"Did you ever see anything quite so obnoxiously crude?" asked David.

Suddenly his eyes narrowed. He nodded toward a nearby table. "An old friend of yours."

There sat Rufo in evening clothes, and with him Henriette Cheval and Sasha. He looked unusually porcine, with great flabby but brutal jowls, a big paunch and stubby hands, covered with diamond rings.

Henriette, very décolleté, was plastered down with diamonds and pearls. How well she had hid her years! She was fuller now, but her large bosom made her stately and if anything more voluptuous. The bronze-haired Sasha had become a plump platinum blonde. She wore a diamond tiara.

"Our great peasant leader!" sneered David, "supposed to be restoring lands to the poor. Every day, his speeches become more ardently revolutionary. I wonder who Rufo's jade is?"

Esperanza explained who Henriette was. "The last time I saw her, she was a bit down in the world. He must have saved her from being deported. She was the madame of one of Arbusto's houses."

David slapped the table. "That's a real exposé for us. If we can tie Maceo and that whole Caraveo case up to Rufo —"

"The other girl was formerly Henriette's maid."

"Really. She's famous around here now—Sasha Solenz. She's the off-and-on mistress of the army, the navy, the fire-department and the cabinet, especially one particular member."

The floor show began. Three American negroes did a humorous tap dance. Then a tall American blonde did a strip dance, which was greeted with yells and applause. Next a troop of American blondes pranced out dressed in three roses and executed a mechanical pony dance, not bad.

In the midst of this act, there came a crashing sound. The windows smashed. Stones banged into the cabaret.

People near the windows jumped up, frightened. A table went over with a smash of glasses and of a champagne bottle. The silver tub clanged and rolled across the floor, leaving a trail of cracked ice.

A woman, caught in her gown, went sprawling. She got up, both her shoulder straps broken, holding up her green gown.

"Here's where we don't pay our bill." David laughed. "Come."

Taking Esperanza by the hand, he ran toward the door.

There they were caught in a back eddy of frightened folk, but managed to wedge their way through into the entrance hall. Men and women were daubing at their eyes.

"Tear bombs!" exclaimed David.

Their own eyes began to smart.

But hearing more crashing sounds in the gambling hall, they pressed forward to the high platform and watched the scene, tears streaming down their faces.

A wild group of students had smashed the windows and had jumped in.

The frightened patrons had fled to one end.

"Look!" cried Esperanza. "Of all things—Bobo!"

"He's a sort of student mascot these days."

The dwarf crouched on one of the tables. He let out an unearthly "Whooeee!" and hurled a stink bomb toward the far end of the hall.

With the others, he leapt nimbly from table to table, smashing the roulette wheels, scattering the chips about, ripping up the green baize mats, hurling the dice cages, bent and twisted, to the floor.

By this time several policemen and the strong-arm men of the place, also some of the guests, got into action. They rushed the students.

There was a wild mêlée in the center of the floor. A hat popped high into the air. A gun went off. There was a tinkle of glass. A big light went out.

Several students were laid out, the rest retreated fighting, toward an exit.

A strong-arm man dived for Bobo, missed him.

Bobo leapt lightly from table to table, mocking his pursuers.

He reached a window, gave a shrieking, "Whooeee!" that echoed all over the place and disappeared.

The struggle was soon over. The students vanished. Of the two knocked out, one was dead. Four others had been taken into custody.

It was the most remarkable scandal Mexico City had known in many a day. The newspapers, under the thumb of the authorities, called it an act of wanton vandalism.

But few honorable persons criticized the students very severely. One little sheet, in fact, referred to Christ and the money-changers.

The students, Esperanza meditated, were in any case better emissaries of Christ than the Guadalajara train attackers.

The captured students were sent off to the islands, without trial.

Esperanza, worried lest Bobo, so easily recognizable, would be arrested, tried to locate him, but apparently he had disappeared from the city.

The Struggle printed an exposé of Rufo's connection with the Monte Carlo Club; it painted a picture of him there at the night of the riot with Henriette Cheval and Sasha, and called him a protector of the habitués of the red light world. It was a dirty piece—and effective.

Rufo's strong-arm gang retaliated by descending on the paper and smashing the offices to bits.

The Federation was having fiercer battles, for it was clear that Rufo wanted it crushed, because this would increase his prestige as the sole controller of the labor movement and hence augment his power in the government.

As a result, David was converted into a dynamo of energy. Besides his painting, he was busy organizing, speaking, writing, soliciting funds. Boldly again and again he attacked Rufo and his methods.

Esperanza grew more and more worried.

One night he came in with a sleeve torn off, a black eye and bloody contusions on his head.

"Three guys tried to manhandle me as I was passing an alley," he explained. "I guess they'd have laid me out cold if I hadn't seen them in time. Well, one of them will wake up in the hospital. They got in some good licks, though. Lord, my shoulder is sore."

One arm was bruised almost to pulp and Esperanza called for Dr. Chávez.

Now terribly frightened, time and again she warned David to be careful. "Remember Caraveo. A lesson learned should never be forgotten."

"Believe me, I'm watching my step. Rufo is not the person to stop at anything once he has made up his mind. He's like an octopus, sitting there behind the scenes, always intriguing, wrapping his tentacles about everything. He's without a decent principle in the world."

From this time on, every time David left the house, Esperanza was in a panic and spent many hours of terrible anxiety.

In Cuernavaca, he was even more exposed. What was to prevent Rufo's thugs from attacking him on the scaffold when he was painting?

LXII

On a Saturday David and Esperanza went back to Cuernavaca with Marta and Toño.

Toño was enthusiastic about David's new frescoes.

"You are going to have competition down here. Ambassador Morrow has hired Diego Rivera to paint the portico of the Palace of Cortés."

"So I hear. The more the merrier. He's a great painter, perhaps the best we have. Orozco has greater moments, but he's very uneven and not so sustained, and is not basically a fresco painter. I'm just third fiddle to them."

"Nonsense," said Toño. "There your judgment is certainly wrong. Neither Rivera nor Orozco can hold a candle to you."

They all went over to the Borda gardens to have some beer.

Caldwell and his wife happened along and sat down at their table. Marta and Mrs. Caldwell had already met. Watching closely, Esperanza saw that Marta's face, as before, betrayed repugnance for Caldwell.

Toño and Marta wanted to go on to Taxco and Acapulco, provided David and Esperanza would chaperone them.

David had long wished to visit both places.

As for Toño he had heard of an Indian woman in Taxco who worked miracles, and the allurements of that was strong enough to send him across even higher mountains than those over which the auto road wormed its way on south.

While the car they had hired was stocking up with gas and oil at the service station in the plaza for the long trip, a high-powered auto zoomed over the cobbles to the Morelos Hotel.

It was full of hard-faced dusty men all armed. They looked like thugs.

Esperanza, alarmed, called David's attention to them.

He merely laughed—"probably just some politicians down for a blow out. All politicians look like gangsters."

They swung into Taxco over the rim of an enormous golden valley fused like hot metal in the noon-day sun, and climbed slowly up a narrow cobbled lane to the sleepy plaza in front of the beautiful Santa Prisca Church with its ornate top-heavy bell-towers.

They found themselves guests of Thurston Valliant, a former engineer, who had bought and remodelled a little house at the crest of a steep twisting lane on the—literally—Street of Dreams. It overlooked the hodge-podge of tiled roofs and crooked paths. From his porch they could see the mildewed house and garden where a century earlier the great German scientist, Von Humboldt, had lived.

Thurston, an eccentric chap, with an unusually big nose and prematurely graying hair, was, it seemed, going to hell in his own pleasant way. At least, thought Esperanza, Caldwell, one of the animated hands of this world, not a trace of æsthetic feeling in his make-up, would have decided that a man turning his back on the material-success standards of his own country to sink himself deliberately into the frame of a simple rural alien culture, was surely going to hell. Though evidently himself not yet free from all doubts concerning the process, Thurston had clearly found something else of which the men of measured mirth in this world never know anything.

Thurston, amused by Toño's interest in the witch-woman—the two men got along famously from the first moment—took him over right after lunch.

Marta, as she went for a walk with David and Esperanza, sighed. "He will be the death of me yet with his romantic superstitions. Imagine a grown-up man taking stock in such things!"

But there was motherly fondness in her tone.

When David was out of earshot, Esperanza probed Marta as to why she had broken with Caldwell. She had never before, all these years, gotten up courage to ask her.

"He's a slimy hypocrite," she said vehemently, then bit her lip. "Oh, I'm not angry. He had his own selfish purposes, but he helped me. It's just that now I see through him so completely. Well, what his colorless wife doesn't know doesn't hurt her. She must have a drab existence."

"She has everything she wants."

Marta lifted her eyebrows. "Everything!—perhaps—I don't know her life—but human companionship, written in terms of dollars and comfort?—She has a defeated look to me. Caldwell married her for her money. His whole life has been based on selfish calculation. Love, loyalty, the nobler sentiments, however much he poses them, have never entered into his emotional existence, just selfish calculation every step."

"Not so far as Winifred is concerned. He worships her."

"Winifred," jeered Marta. "She's his ticket into Heaven, the note of goodness to complete his complete smugness. At that he may find that even Winifred some day will refuse to be merely a ticket for his front-row seat in Heaven."

Esperanza was not convinced. "I don't think you're quite fair. He has many fine traits. He wasn't very square with Milpa Verde, but he may not have been to blame. And with David and me and Mercedes and Guadalupe, he's been more personally decent than he had any need to be. We don't belong to his level. He has no need of us. But he's gone out of his way to be a good friend."

Marta shrugged.

Esperanza turned the subject to Dr. Chávez.

Marta pulled her down on the balustrade which flanked the hill-perched street.

"I don't know what to do? He wants me to marry him."

"No! Really? And Toño?"

"That's the rub. I like them both."

"But which do you love?"

Marta turned her face toward the town. "Love—love—I suppose I'm beyond that particular emotion. Dr. Chávez—Enrique—

is a fine person, but he's so self-sufficient. He knows so much more than most human beings. His ego and his kindness are so satisfactorily balanced in him. He's really quite perfect. He's really a man.

"I suppose, especially since I've worked at the Museum, I could help him in some ways. But he makes me feel how little I've made of my own life. He's really a great person."

"And so—you are here with Toño," Esperanza smiled.

Marta dropped some pebbles into the bushes at the bottom of the balustrade.

"I told Enrique he had to give me some time. This trip, well, it's a sort of try-out of Toño. Toño adores me, always has. I know him. He's comfortable. I think probably he needs me much more than Enrique ever would."

She turned to Esperanza a bit eagerly. "Toño has never really grown up. He's a bundle of impulses and hidden obscurities. He's a mystic. He's never thought anything through all his life long—I suppose few of us have, until after we've been given a good knockout. Toño—sort of needs being taken care of. To be adored and to have some one to take care of—well—that's rather nice.

"You see, in a way, Enrique, Dr. Chávez, is too good for me. I'd be a little cog in his life. I could make it run more smoothly, but after all a cog is but a cog."

"You make Dr. Chávez out as rather inhuman," said Esperanza.

Marta shook her head violently. "Just the opposite. He's the most human person I've ever met. But he's also strong and intelligent and successful, and without any of the childish vanities of success—He's all right. I admire him, I suppose, far more than I do Toño—But —"

David was coming up the hill.

Marta jumped off the balustrade and shook out her dress. "And so, Esperanza dear, you see what I mean when I say I'm not in love. Being in love is a proper abdication of one's intelligence."

"One kind of love, certainly —"

David suggested they look up his namesake and fellow-painter, David Siqueiros, just then living in Taxco. But neither Siqueiros nor his wife were at home.

They stayed the night in Taxco and got an early start the next morning for the twelve hour drive to Acapulco, the Pacific port.

They dropped down to hot Iguala, in its ring of suffocating

hills, then up and up; then down and down the long ridges in a thrilling ride to Chilpancingo.

As they coasted down a long straight stretch, the high-powered car of the previous day zoomed past them at terrific speed.

Esperanza caught a glimpse of leering faces.

Again she was alarmed, but David didn't think it meant anything.

From Chilpancingo, a quaint, half-abandoned tropical town where modern gasoline stations of garish tint elbowed the ancient brown church, they climbed over range after range of majestic mountains.

Not until dusk did they drop down among the thatched roofs of Acapulco, clambering from hill to sea, a sea tinted with the blood of sunset.

"A swim! We must have a swim before supper!" decreed David.

They undressed behind rocks and dipped in without bathing suits.

The buoyant salt water was deliciously cool after the suffocating hot air of the port. It was a velvet caress on the naked body.

Esperanza turned over on her back and floated.

An orange moon oozed up over the crag-like hills surrounding the harbor, but aside from that, as she drifted, paddling slightly, the world, everything seemed to have vanished. She was floating on pure ether. Her body was light as a feather.

There was a slight movement beside her, an arm over and under her.

She half turned and came against David, his body cool and firm.

He kissed her, and his lips were salty but sweet.

They swam together, her hand on his shoulder.

They lay on the smooth wave-worn rocks in the dark to dry, then dressed, and though the night air was still sultry, they felt refreshed and hungry as bears.

They strolled up to the ramshackle hotel to have dinner.

David and Toño went on into the dining-room. Marta and Esperanza went upstairs.

Suddenly Esperanza remembered the strange auto and the armed men. She hurried down with Marta.

In the small office and lobby, Esperanza saw, behind the desk—Lorenzo Romero.

"Why, Esperanza!" he cried, rushing around and extending both hands eagerly.

Again she felt his queer magnetism and resented it.

But this soon evaporated. He had grown so greasily plump. Sly pettiness marked his features.

"Señorita Sandoval," Esperanza said, a bit primly.

He bowed in a way that made Marta look at him interestedly.

"I never expected to run into the great Lorenzo de la Fé here," drawled Esperanza.

"You come to my hotel and do not expect to see me. Well, fame is an illusory thing. Times have changed—for me, perhaps also for you."

"I might have guessed this hotel was yours—from the outlandish prices you charge."

He spread out his hands in mock protest. "It is, I should remind you, the only hotel here. Stop at my hotel or spend the night on the beach."

"Which wouldn't be bad compared to this." She started on.

He spoke intensely. "Oh, I don't blame you for despising me. I was very upset those days. And you," he added wistfully, "have grown very elegant, and more strikingly handsome than ever."

Into the lobby glided a woman, almost stealthily. Her face, once pretty, now had a dissipated expression and something unutterably cruel in mouth and eyes. It was the "cousin" who had admitted Esperanza to Lorenzo's house in Mexico City.

"My wife—" said Romero.

"By the way," drawled Esperanza, "our party includes Señor Antonio de la Selva. Perchance you remember him? I believe you had a little money transaction with him once."

The woman gave a start. Lorenzo stiffened; his face darkened.

Marta and Esperanza went on into the dining-room.

"A most curious man," whispered Marta. "What is the trouble between him and Toño?"

"Some business difficulty. Best not mention it."

Esperanza was thinking of her strange trip up to the windy crest of Peñescal. Those days seemed remote indeed.

Lorenzo had changed! Something, for a brief moment in his life, had lifted him to magnificent arrogance above fate, above other humans. Then the spark, evidently, had died out. He had always been a charlatan, but, for a short while, such a magnificent one.

In the dining-room, Esperanza recognized one of the faces she had seen in the high-powered car.

David had already made inquiries. As he had surmised, they were politicians: two congressmen, a general, some friends, two doubtful parrot-loud girls much be-painted, all now roaring hilariously over their cups.

Esperanza breathed easier.

LXIII

One day in Cuernavaca, David had accused Esperanza: "Lately you are always alone with yourself. I do not really touch you any more."

His words were a shock. Was he getting tired of her?

She had been aloof in a peculiarly moody state of late. But partly, of course, his words were a normal sex-plaint. But in his case, it was also the plaint of all whites, even those of mixed blood, trying to love a native woman deeply.

The Indian is ever rooted in an introspection sufficient unto itself, not like white introspection which feeds on the subtle nuances with another person, which leads to tortured emotional conflicts and adjustments. Her introspection rather fed on life's own roots, so that the sap flowed up through the body and mind within the inner crust. It was tree-like.

In the case of David and herself there was communion, understanding because of the Indian knowledge in David, but it was not European understanding. She simply did not, despite her interest in all his activities, feed the European in him, perhaps never could do so, though God knew she had tried. She could not, however much she willed, go easily walking over the sea of ideas like David did. Rather, whatever she thought or believed was like the swell of the sea itself.

And yet their union was really simpler and deeper than any middle-class European arrangement, behind which was the plump ghost of private property and social status and cut-and-dried manners. The joy of their union consisted, not so much in immediate physical, emotional and intellectual contacts as in the sharing of the deeper source of those contacts.

If she had been rather remote from him lately, it was largely because he was now so active she did not have the chance for intimacy that they had enjoyed when his painting was occupying all his time. And as he had taken up his work with the Federation

again, she had not felt so enthusiastic about it all as she once had. Somehow she was more interested now in just plain domesticity. She was also in a curious mood of questioning all values. She wanted some deeper truth about life than she had yet found. Did he sense this subtle change in her? Or was he merely getting tired of her?

She brooded long over his passing remark. It grew and grew in her mind, assuming tragic proportions. Were his feverish interests in part an escape from her, a filling up of his time because of a relationship no longer entirely satisfactory? At bottom he was a far better painter than a politician, but he was always turning away from painting to other things, which seemed to her partly to betray his true genius.

But he seemed happy enough. She was probably merely imagining things. He should do what he wanted to do.

She herself was fundamentally happy with David and only because of David. He was as tangible to her as the corn in the fields, the grinding stone in the hand, the wool between the fingers. She was sure that she, in a different way, was much the same for him. He had scarcely looked at another woman since he had first met her.

Why then did she have such constantly recurrent dark thoughts? She was thirty-nine now, a dangerous age. Was there, unknown to herself, something which brought her a true premonition of some disaster, some trouble?

He soon finished up his Cuernavaca frescoes. Rosa and Rafael, Toño and Marta and Julia and Tirso Bardo came down to a party to celebrate the event and bid farewell to the Caldwells, at last going for good to the United States. Tirso Bardo did a nice publicity piece about David's latest work.

David and Esperanza took up permanent residence again in Mexico City.

David was now busy almost entirely with the Federation. He still expected her to be part of all his activities. But she could hardly keep up with him now and did not always have the inclination or the necessary illusions, however much the close-up struggle made the most trivial things seem dreadfully important.

As important and necessary as was the Federation, it was too much an urban movement, its leadership too theoretical, too intellectualized. Even the Mexico City proletariat in a way exploited the poorer, more ignorant peasants.

Out in the rural districts, still largely illiterate, were the Indian masses, which the Federation scarcely touched. This great racial and cultural division still lay at the root of Mexico's difficulties.

Esperanza recalled how she herself had fluctuated in her interests between the city and the village, how for a time she had created an economic foothold in both. Her weaving and selling had been an interlude when she had achieved a breathing space of calm. Now she realized that over the years an unconscious struggle had been going on in herself, at the root of which lay the communalistic psychology and habits of the village as opposed to the commercialized profit system of the city. It was, she felt, a struggle that must explain much of Mexico's history.

Apparently, now, she had been pulled definitely into city life. But somehow, even yet, she was not fully integrated with it, did not accept it. The village often called her. Times were when she imagined herself walking through the ripe cornfields, times when she longed for the twilight brush smoke, for the strong goat scent, the smell of damp wool, of fresh straw. She had laid aside a certain way of life for David, and she had been happy, was still happy.

Yet she felt a certain lack of creative life, that creative satisfaction she had had strongly in her simple days of weaving mats or on her loom. Something, something very vital and important had escaped her. Perhaps it escaped all modern city folk.

Her only creative activities, now—for her job, which she had gotten back, if interesting was scarcely that—were making David happy and helping in the cause so dear to him and close to her. But where, where would she be now if the tie with David were broken? If he were killed, for instance? And that, with Rufo so powerful, was more than a possibility.

Why, why, she asked herself once more, did she have these recurrent dark thoughts? Gradually she could not escape the somber conviction that another cycle of her life was drawing to a close, that it would end, and as usual, tragically. Some deep fatalistic instinct warned her of reefs ahead. Ever since that episode of the miscarriage she had not been entirely sure of his affection.

Quite unexpectedly David was named delegate to an international congress in Montevideo. He would be gone at least two months.

He wanted to take her along, but the trip cost too much.

The only good feature of his going was that politics were getting rougher. Rufo had taken other punitive actions against the Federation. At least for a while David would not be within reach.

But the very idea of his going off at this particular juncture was like tearing something growing out of her heart. It seemed almost an answer to her dark brooding. Only once before had they ever been apart so long. In her present mood of questioning all values, the separation really alarmed her.

It was heart-breaking to see him off on the Vera Cruz train. Two months—such a long time!

As they embraced, Esperanza felt that in some way or other this trip would bring evil.

The train pulled out. She watched the rear red light glide down the tracks into the night.

She turned away in a daze, with a lost feeling, scarcely realizing that Rosa and Rafael had taken her arm on either side and were telling her that she was to have dinner with them.

PART VI



THE STONES AWAKE



VI

THE STONES AWAKE

LXIV

DAVID gone, Esperanza was so unhappy and found herself brooding so much that she decided to leave the city. She had a month's vacation with pay coming; she asked for an additional month: two months in all to be in Milpa Verde.

The village still looked bedraggled. Many people had left.

Pablo and Petra were very aged, but in sound health. Pablo, a wrinkled old ox, went about his tasks slowly but surely, mumbling proverbs. Petra dawdled over the grinding stone, tended to the chickens, plucked fruit. A sweet-lime tree was now big.

Pablo, Junior, was now driving a bus between Cuatla and Amecameca.

"It's not like the old days when the children stayed on the land," complained Petra.

But she could see him by trudging four miles down to the main road. He would stop to talk to her for a few minutes and often carried produce into Amecameca for her.

Toña had grown into a giggling lummo, heavy footed, heavy of body, plain features ruined by small-pox scars.

Guadalupe and Ignacio were contented and doing well. He had added two new rooms to his house and had put on a bright, tile roof, finer than the curatage itself.

Guadalupe, no longer a reckless young thing, was a plump, pleasant matron, now with four children besides Tadeo. She still wove and embroidered, and though she never went to Mexico City any more, frequently she went into Amecameca, usually taking one of the children.

Esperanza asked Ignacio about the lands.

"There's a vague rumor," he replied, "that we are going to get them back. They say the bank wants some way to get its money out, and so it has made some deal with the government. The hacienda is to be split up. They say that for part of it, the government is secretly putting up enough money to cover the taxes and the bank's mortgages and will start a farm school. The rest

will be sold for back taxes—some general will grab it for a song. Milpa Verde will get its lands so it won't squawk. That's the story, anyway. Things, they say, are going to boom around here. Popo Park is opening up again. An important general, Lázaro Cárdenas, has bought a house there."

"And Joaquín's widow?" asked Esperanza.

Ignacio shrugged. "They'll most likely kiss her good-bye."

"A great sport in Mexico, robbing widows."

"Anyway, we'd get a little land, and the generals a lot."

And so, thought Esperanza, the revolutionary ideals were upheld. But a few years ago, no peasant would have known that much about what was going on. But Ignacio had always been clever.

"The question is," he was asking her now, "if that happens, are you going to be a member of the village? You have communal rights here."

Guadalupe clasped her hands. Her eyes shone brightly.

A pang went through Esperanza. She was no longer part of all this.

But if something should happen to David?

Ignacio noticed her hesitation. "There's a nice place for sale."

A house in Milpa Verde! Her old plan before she met David. A sudden peace enfolded her.

Over the years she had saved up a little money. To buy a house might not be a bad idea, even if she came up only occasionally.

She looked from Ignacio's high house down upon the topsy-turvy village and across at the volcanoes, and something of their old power was wielded over her—that old time tranquillity. The village was lovely.

"There's a place above San Benito," persisted Ignacio, "that could be got for not more than four hundred pesos."

They persuaded her to at least have a look at it.

A spiral of stone steps led up to the garden wall, smothered with honey-suckle and trumpet vines. Big flaggings lay across the sloping ground to the front porch with four little columns. From the porch one could see most of the village and the volcanoes. In the back was a small orchard—sweet-limes, tejocotes, apple trees. The world was at her feet here.

"Marvelous!" she cried, enthusiastically. "I always thought this the most desirable house in all Milpa Verde."

"You may never get the chance again —"

"No, no," she said, with a trace of irritation. "It's just too ridiculous even to think about it. I come up so rarely now."

But the idea of owning the little place nestled in her heart. She turned away regretfully.

No word came through from David, not a sign as to when he would return, nothing.

Finally, worried, Esperanza went back to Mexico City two days before she had to.

She found the apartment in an upturn state.

Frightened, she saw that most of David's things had been removed, and found a hastily scrawled letter.

ESPERANZA, dear: We must separate. When in Montevideo, I fell in love with Aurora Leonides, the Paraguayan poet. She has come back with me.

I wish you well. You are a remarkable woman, and I appreciate all you have done for me and wish you good luck.

What I am doing is scarcely fair to you. But I cannot do otherwise. I hope you will find some way to forgive me.

DAVID.

The world went black. She sank on the couch, stunned, finally fell over sideways and wept.

Why had he not sent word to her in Milpa Verde? Why had he not at least come to tell her?—Merely this brief, cruel note—

She dawdled over the stove, frying eggs and making coffee. But she could not touch the eggs, and her hand shook so she slopped the coffee. Her scalding tears began to fall.

Was this really the end? Did she dare hope at all?

LXV

Esperanza needed to talk to some one—Julia Patterson. After his trip, David, needing money, would have gone to see if any pictures had been sold.

Removing the signs of her tears as best she could, Esperanza hurried down to Julia's shop.

Julia gave her a big hug. "It's good to see you—And I'm terribly sorry—I know all about it, of course—David is a fool, a perfect fool."

With an angry toss of her frizzly, blonde hair, she took Esperanza to the rear to talk.

"I don't know what to do," began Esperanza. "I love him—" She started to cry. "But—but if he's happy that's all I ask."

Julia's curly hair seemed to writhe serpent-like; she glared through her glasses.

"That girl has made a perfect chump out of him—I don't believe he's in love with her. Being far from home, he had an intrigue, then she piled herself on the boat with him. She's a capricious, unstable person. She won't make him happy, and she won't stick. It won't last."

"Should I see him?"

"By all means," said Julia. "I think if he had to face the issue, he would choose you. He's too upset to know what he's doing."

"Is she young? He's probably tired of me."

Julia sniffed. "No one can do for him what you have done or be the companion you have been. Such things count, not merely youth. He isn't a spring chicken himself any more."

She gave Esperanza David's new address, patted her on the shoulder, encouraged her.

But to see David where he was living with Aurora might anger him. Undoubtedly he would go to the Federation headquarters.

On her way there, she bought an afternoon *Gráfico*. The first thing she saw was an extensive critique of the poetry of the Paraguayan writer, Aurora Leonides.

Esperanza's heart sank. Her old village humility, a sense of inferiority, overwhelmed her.

David was not at the Federation, would not be back until the morrow.

Esperanza went back to the empty apartment.

But she could not stand it there alone.

She had not gone yet to see Rosa, who now lived on Serapio Rendón street, so she set out. She had to go past the old unfinished Congress building, started by Díaz, never finished. Now the gaunt iron ribs were being converted into "The Monument of the Revolution"—what a farce! Bulky granite cubist statues were being lifted up to their places by huge cranes.

Rosa was happy to see her, for Rafael had gone out of town on business for several days.

Rosa was now twenty-three. She was expecting her second child.

Esperanza was shocked; again it was brought home to her that she was a grandmother. She felt so young, so full of life, but reminded of her years, she wept again.

Rosa made her lie down, tried to comfort her.

She was very upset by David's conduct. "And I always stuck up for him!" she cried.

"Sh—sh—" cautioned Esperanza.

Playing with two-year-old Pedro, a chubby wideawake child, Esperanza recovered her spirits somewhat. She helped Rosa put him to bed, and stayed all night.

The next morning, before going to the Federation, Esperanza went past her apartment and there found a messenger patiently waiting for her.

Fingers shaking, hoping the message might be from David, she tore open the note he brought.

It was from Caldwell. He had just returned to the city, was anxious to see her. Would she come at once to the Hotel Regis? The messenger would bring her in the car. "You will do me an inestimable service."

Esperanza, so anxious to get to the Federation, hesitated, then, curious, decided to see Caldwell first. She wondered why he was staying at the hotel instead of the house.

"It was nice of you to come right away," he said cordially, asking her to sit down in the reception room of his suite.

They chatted at random. Ida, he told her, was now just finishing school. She and her mother would be down shortly. Winifred had been graduated from Barnard at mid-term. She had been editor for half a year of the college magazine and expected to be a writer. She was returning from four months' travel in Europe.

"She has a wonderful imagination," said Caldwell glowingly, "and she'll succeed. She's engaged—fine chap."

They chatted for some time, Esperanza, half in a daze from her personal worry, examined Caldwell's now elderly, dignified, but somewhat Rabelaisian-deacon countenance. It suddenly occurred to her, as she thought of the stealing of Milpa Verde's lands, of Pepita, of Marta, of the bank failures, that success in this world unless in the creative arts, or in the art of living itself, is a synonym for being unprincipled, of having lust but no love, of expressing noble sentiments but never letting them rule one's own life and desires, of appearing to be philanthropic, but always being hard and egoistic. Perhaps she was judging him too harshly.

He leaned back and examined his cigar reflectively.

"By the way, I'm staying here just long enough to liquidate

my private interests in Mexico. We have a deal on which may fix up Milpa Verde."

She wondered if it were the deal Ignacio had mentioned, but Caldwell would explain no further.

"What I really want to talk to you about is the Estrella plantation. It is good property, and as things are quiet now, I'm not closing it out. But we still have considerable labor trouble. We need a new type of manager. It simply can't be run on the old basis. I was thinking possibly of getting your brother, José. He impressed me as being honest, energetic and knowing how to handle men. What is more important, he is very well-known and respected in the whole region. He has the confidence of the peasants. I don't suppose he knows much about running a big estate, but we could put in proper men to handle technical and business matters. Do you think he'd be interested?"

She gave him José's address in San Antonio.

Caldwell said he would get in touch with him when he went north.

Esperanza was both happy and upset by it, happy because it might mean they could be reunited, upset because it might conflict with José's ideals of land for the peasants. She couldn't afford to lose any more illusions about anybody and least of all about her own brother. It would depend upon the conditions on Estrella, she supposed, whether he could accept it or not, but she hoped that in any case he would find some way to come back so they could all be together.

She asked Caldwell about the Asturian majordomo, father of Pepita.

Caldwell made a wry face. "The man will be retired on a small pension."

Esperanza left and hurried on to the Federation.

This time she found David. He was buried in a file of old newspapers.

He was embarrassed and remorseful. A bit stiffly, he said, "I'm sorry for what I've done. It's a mess. I didn't want to hurt you."

If he had been arrogant or abusive, she could have stood it better. She began to sob.

Nervous, with a quick look around to see if any one was observing, he said, "Come, let's go down to the café."

He hastened to lead her out.

In the little Chinese place where Caraveo had been warned, they sat over the coffee.

Esperanza now had control over herself. No man likes a woman who weeps. Nor did she wish to make any false appeals to his goodness. One's strong side is always the side of one's true happiness.

She took refuge in talking about Caldwell and José.

At last they came back to their own problem.

"I had to see you, David," apologized Esperanza. "I don't want to bother you, but after all, we have been so many years together, the happiest years of my life, I could not part from you with just that little note as a farewell."

"I guess I'm a dog," he said brokenly. "I didn't want to hurt you. I merely thought that would be easiest for both of us."

"There is no need for you to shun me. I love you as deeply as ever, but I don't demand anything. I put your happiness first."

She halted, not trusting her emotions.

He looked glum. "It's a mess. I don't even know whether I really love Aurora. Just now, certainly, I want her."

Esperanza tried bravely to smile. "I'm not blaming you. She is young. She is a poetess, probably clever and intelligent. My time is past. I don't want to stand in your way."

With the end of a spoon, he traced a design on the table. His voice choked.

"You are a noble person, always were."

Esperanza spoke more lightly than she felt. "Don't take it so hard." She put her hand on his sleeve. "You have taught me much about life. I am grateful."

But he was in a mood to explain. "Aurora and I just fell into each other's arms in Montevideo —"

She stared hard—a lump in her throat—at a commercial calendar, with Chinese letters down the side of the picture of a girl showing long legs in silk stockings. It grew blurred.

David was talking on miserably. "I don't know, as I say, whether I really love her." He traced more designs. "But I had to do it. And she is here, came along on the boat—has no money—no friends here—I—have to take care of her."

Esperanza looked at him pityingly. "It's not quite so simple as that."

"It won't be permanent," he said emphatically.

Her heart bounded. He might, then, come back to her?

"Oh, damn it all!" he exploded. "I feel like a dirty dog."

"Don't," she soothed him. "You only make it harder for yourself. I haven't the slightest resentment—Perhaps we are both trying to be too noble," she added with just a trace of bitterness. "Too noble for our own good. I love you. I am shameful enough to confess it."

"It's all a mess—I guess—at bottom—I still care—for you.—I was happy with you—always. I can't say that now."

A boundless affection gripped her as she looked at his mass of curly, black hair, growing gray about the temples. She wished she could stroke his half-bowed head, but again she controlled herself.

In a matter of fact tone, she said, "If you feel that way, the three of us ought to talk it over."

David was alarmed. "No! No!" he cried. "That would never do. She's an unreasonable spit-fire. She deals only in emotions."

They threshed the thing back and forth, finally got down to more practical things.

"Do you want the apartment, David?"

"No, you keep it."

She smiled wanly at his obtuseness. "I'll keep it the rest of this month, then I'll move to a cheaper place."

He laid his hand on her sleeve. "This has upset your life."

She was angered—a momentary flash. Rising abruptly, she said she must be going.

"Good-bye, David. Any time you feel like it, come to lunch. At least we can be good friends. It would mean a lot to me to see you now and then."

She hurried back to the apartment in a daze.

How could she work out her life?

She discounted the possibility of his ever returning to her. But all she wanted was David. Nothing else in life mattered.

A thousand memories danced through her brain: how they had first met, the bargaining in the market—the posing—the first time he had kissed her—the Jalisco strike—the train attack—how he had kissed her there, lying on the railroad embankment, the bullets whistling over them—how he had kissed her that balmy night in Acapulco when they were swimming under the stars —

They had been as one in mind and heart and body. Despite her uncertain temper during the four months after her miscarriage, they had never quarrelled. They had always understood each

other's needs perfectly and had always found every task a mutual happiness.

As twilight descended over the room, she grew unutterably sad and fell to weeping again. She finally went out and walked feverishly through the dark streets.

For hours she walked and walked. She ran into Elena, her old friend of the Vamos de Nuevo cantina, who was at the moment just going to work in Peravillo.

Esperanza accompanied her, telling of her trouble.

"Forget him," was Elena's sententious advice. "Men just don't appreciate a woman who's decent to them."

They agreed vaguely they would see each other again soon. Esperanza continued walking.

LXVI

The following day someone knocked on Esperanza's door. There stood David.

"Didn't expect me quite so soon, did you?" he muttered.

He slumped into a chair, looking tired and beaten. Suddenly he burst out: "Aurora is crazy!"

Esperanza cut him off. "Make yourself comfortable for the moment," she said, giving him something to read, "while I get lunch."

She bustled in and out, keeping the conversation to casual remarks.

"It seems like old times, being here," he put in, smiling a bit ruefully. "By the way, I've a new fresco job in the monument the government is putting up in San Angel. It's a great chance."

"I'm so glad!" she cried, halting, a dish in her hand. "You always function well when you are painting."

But bitterly she thought, probably this Aurora will be his model.

They ate cheerfully. She gave him the news about Milpa Verde.

Over the coffee, he insisted on speaking of Aurora again.

"She's a jealous little fool. Unless I'm petting her or spending all my time with her, she thinks I'm seeing this or that woman. She's senselessly jealous and makes silly scenes. The result is—I'm seeing you."

After lunch, they sat on the couch. He kept reminiscing about

things they had done together—"Do you remember when—Do you —?"

Finally she cried out! "Don't, David, for God's sake! I can't stand it. You only make things harder."

He agreed gloomily. "I realize now I've spoiled everything. I am bound to you, Esperanza. I love you."

Her heart quickened. A glow spread over her. But she did not encourage him, merely said, "You're upset."

"Aurora," he continued, "has a hold on me. She's a crazy, flaming sort of person, but she has no peace in her soul, nor any understanding, and less tolerance. She sidetracks all my energies and purposefulness. I don't do anything calmly. I'm afraid even to begin planning this new fresco. It was different with you." He put his head in his hands. "I wish to God I hadn't messed things up."

Esperanza took a deep breath. "I wish—I wish I really had faith that you feel the way you say. When you are sure, come back to me. I won't ever say a word about what has happened."

He paced up and down, then said abruptly. "I'll stay here. She can go to the devil."

Esperanza concealed her joy by cleaning off the table. "I hope you know what you are doing."

He put his arms around her. She set the dishes down and closed her eyes and leaned back against him.

"I do know, Esperanza." He laid his cheek against hers.

She whirled about and threw her arms about his neck.

They sat down on the couch again, his arm about her. She leaned against his shoulder. Did he feel the peace, the delicious peace, that she felt?

But two days later when she returned from work, she found another note.

ESPERANZA dear. You have been wonderful. But it's no use. Aurora has been after me. I can't resist her. I had to go with her.

Esperanza was filled with anger, fear, sorrow hopelessness. She tried to picture the situation.

Evidently David had been attracted by Aurora's youth and her emotional whimsicalness; they had been swept together violently, just as violently her uncertain temperament had caused them to separate, then had drawn them together again. Such an emotional strain could not last; gradually they would wear each

other out. But by the time David was quite through with Aurora, the bond between him and herself, thought Esperanza, might be so weakened she might lose him anyway.

If he were not deceiving her—now she was not so sure—if he knew, as he had told her over and over the two days he was with her, that by taking up with Aurora he was ruining his life, incidentally hers also, then he was not really following his true desires.

Why, she argued, should he go through such a blind, hopeless procedure. His real mission in life—his work, his painting—might be permanently maimed. It was her duty to help him break away entirely. It is fortunate when one's duty and one's innermost desires coincide.

Once more she hunted him out, this time not in resignation but really to argue the thing out with him. After a few days she won him back.

He felt silly about it this time.

"By the way," he told her, "as though I didn't have enough personal rumpus, there is trouble at the Federation. I'm to be put on trial tomorrow night."

Esperanza could not believe it. "But, David, you helped organize it, you have given it all your time and energy. You have sacrificed your personal interests and your career for it."

"Such things don't count. A few hot heads have gotten in. The authorities have given us a raw deal in a number of strikes, so some of the members want to come out openly against the government. That's suicide. We'd merely be persecuted, hampered, driven underground. We should leave politics alone and merely build up our strength."

Esperanza nodded. "But just why should you be put on trial?"

"Government employees, as I on this painting, have been ordered to sign personal manifestos attacking the reactionary Rodríguez government or resign as protest. I refused to do either."

They went to the trial together the following night. It proved a stormy session.

David argued that to challenge the government openly was rank foolishness leading to disaster. It was even more foolish to strike at the livelihood of its own members as individuals. The resolution forced whatever members happened to be in government employ, even though they had nothing to do with the gov-

ernment's policies, to declare individual, not group, strikes against the government.

How valuable, though Esperanza, Caraveo would be now! Except for two or three lame speakers, David's friends seemed afraid to take his part.

She took the floor, reminding the members of all that David had done.

The spear head of the opposition to David was Estevan García, a new leader, at bottom chiefly interested in personal power in the organization. A narrow dogmatist, but at the same time a schemer, he saw the chance to advance himself by taking an ill-considered pseudo-radical line and thus kick out the best leaders.

An eloquent exhibitionist, García swept everything before him. David was expelled.

"Well," said David ruefully, after he and Esperanza left. "At least I can devote more time to my painting."

Esperanza could tell he had been deeply hurt. But from a purely selfish standpoint, she was glad that it had happened. It had given her the chance to stand beside him and fight for him.

But in three days David disappeared, this time without leaving any note.

For the next month a nerve-racking sea-saw began. One day David would say he could not live without Aurora. Two or three or five days later, he would return dejected to Esperanza, saying he loved only her.

Esperanza was torn by a bitter agony she had never known. She tried to remain calm and balanced, but Aurora had swept them all into the current of her mad capriciousness. Increasingly Esperanza found herself in a near hysterical state.

Several times she saw Aurora from a distance, a sallow, intense little woman who wore dashing clothes, rouged heavily and used very affected gestures. Obviously she was vain, neurasthenic, quick-tempered. Out of curiosity Esperanza got hold of her book of poetry. She had to admit that it was good, had fire, a few original ideas and a wild erotic abandon.

One day Aurora appeared unexpectedly in Esperanza's apartment.

Esperanza invited her in and managed to act courteously.

"So you are Esperanza!" Aurora said, in a belittling tone.

"And you, I take it, are Aurora."

They sized each other up.

Aurora, though nearly white, had all the fickle temperament of many women of mixed blood, a fickleness accentuated by the modern radical world. She lived by strange gods and fadist ideas. Her roots cut, she had lost all balance. Not an intellectual person, all her acts, outgrowths of deep instinctive emotional reactions, constantly warred with a vain effort to live by a theoretical code.

Esperanza had seen similar types in the Café of Cartoons among the Bohemians, essentially dislocated and, except for a few real artists, unworthy, cagy for easy and messy emotions and impressions.

But a whole class in society sustained Aurora, all the white Creole tradition of the ruling caste. Esperanza resented all the implied social differences, but for the first time admitted to herself that probably she was fighting a losing battle.

"This is an impossible situation!" Aurora burst out. She leaned forward and tapped her toe. "David tells me he loves me. Why don't you leave him alone?"

Esperanza kept her temper. "He tells me that he loves me. I am interested only in his happiness. He tells me he will never be happy with you. When he tells me himself he doesn't need me, you can rest assured that he won't be bothered by me. Let's call in David. Why shouldn't the three of us talk this over together sensibly? You and I will never get anywhere."

Aurora pursed her lips and shook her head violently. She realized she had no odds in a sensible conversation. Common sense was part of Esperanza's strength.

"No," Aurora said again, "nothing can come out of such a situation with the three of us except more difficulty. But," she added petulantly, nervously buttoning and unbuttoning her gloves, "if you would leave him alone, I know he'd be happy with me."

"I might say the same to you. I have the longer claim. David and I have been together many years. You have tried to break that up. It is not fair. He was happy with me. He still believes that in the long run he will be happier with me."

Aurora flounced around angrily, a savage blaze in her eyes. "Then you refuse to leave him alone?"

"Not till I'm sure he doesn't want me or need me."

"You are blind," Aurora flared up. "Can't you see that it's merely out of foolish pity for you that —"

"Stop!" cried Esperanza. "Unless you are willing to call him

in so the three of us can talk, we'll have no more of this." She stood up.

Aurora pulled on her gloves viciously. "Very well. But I warn you, I won't give him up until I want to."

"That is precisely the difference between us," said Esperanza. Aurora's eyes shone with quick hatred.

She had really wished to make more of a scene, but something in Esperanza's bearing made her petulant violence seem useless, even childish.

She went away, storming, frustrated.

For all her attempt to be sensible, Esperanza still found herself caught in this triangular war, with its strain on the nerves, its moments of supreme joy and its moments of suffering. It was like being out, lost in a tempest. But whatever the occasional grandeur of her emotions, it was all sordid.

Even so, she was powerless to act otherwise. Where sex and passion are involved, it seems that there are periods when one can follow only a rhythm of violent emotion even though knowing it is all folly. Later, one can stir around in the ashes and learn the meaning.

To add to her perplexities, word came that Petra was so ill she wouldn't live.

What a terrible predicament! Esperanza did not wish to go away and leave the field to Aurora.

LXVII

Duty prevailed with Esperanza. She would never forgive herself, could never be happy again, even with David, if Petra died and she had not gone.

There was no doctor in Milpa Verde, nor did Esperanza trust those in Amecameca. She called up Dr. Chávez to ask whether anyone there was by chance reliable.

"I'll go myself," he replied at once. "Don't worry."

"But —"

He hastened to say that he had always wanted to see Milpa Verde, that he had other purposes also in going, and this was his chance.

She was grateful. Friends often could be friends.

They left together the next morning.

Petra was very ill indeed.

Chávez made a quick examination.

A messenger, whom Ignacio secured, was at once sent off to Amecameca for medicines and a mattress.

"We must get her off the damp ground," said Chávez.

Chávez spent his free time making scientific photographs of head types and taking cranial measurements.

Esperanza helped him. She would get many villagers to submit to examination who would otherwise have been suspicious of a stranger.

She came to know even better what a fine person Chávez was. His mind was so utterly different from David's.

"I sympathize whole-heartedly with David's efforts," Chávez remarked. "He's a great artist, too, and that's the side I like best in him, the sensitive, visionary, universal side. He's an idealist. All idealists are maladjusted. That's important in the explanation of all radical movements and of many good artists."

It had never occurred to Esperanza before that David had been maladjusted. He had always, until this affair with Aurora, seemed so completely sure of himself and what he wanted to do.

Chávez replied that all idealists were automatically maladjusted, if not personally, intellectually, because the world could not possibly conform to their ideal.

"Most people, even in a so-called civilized environment, live purely on an animal plane, slightly disguised. They accept the opinions of the group, they are guided purely by selfish interests, they conform to the rat-and-cheese ideal entirely.

"Of course," he added with a laugh, "society can't afford too many maladjusted people. But it needs a certain percentage, otherwise society would stagnate and dry-rot. Most of the world's work has to be done by insensitive people too unimaginative and stupid and dully complacent to be maladjusted. Such as those can never understand David's type. Their instinct only is to persecute and stifle. But the stupid and selfish people would soon wreck the world and themselves if the futile idealists did not keep tugging at them and annoying them.

"As for me, I'm not the propagandist sort. I'm too analytical. I can't easily get worked up over immediate injustices. I'd much rather measure somebody's head than worry about his social condition." He laughed.

Another time the subject of Marta came up.

"What do you know about Marta?" he asked.

"I've known her a long time. She's a good and loyal person."

Chávez was pleased. "I think so, too. She's a very handsome woman besides—there's something reposeful and decorative about her, also something warm and sweet. I wish I knew—" he stopped.

"What?" asked Esperanza.

"I wish I knew why I can't make any headway with her. Is she in love with that idiotic cousin of hers? He's a funny fellow, isn't he—rather likable though. He's a sort of intellectual pin-cushion. Is it that Marta is —?"

"Perhaps, I don't think she quite knows herself. I think she's afraid of you, or perhaps herself when it comes to you. Perhaps she thinks you are too intelligent and self-sufficient and don't really need her. Women like to feel that they are very greatly needed."

Chávez digested this. "Why, of course, I need her. And of course I'm self-sufficient. Every man should be so far as his work is concerned. That is the goal he should strive for. There is satisfaction in mastering your trade perfectly. But what has that got to do with my caring for Marta, or her being happy with me?"

They parted, and he went away thoughtfully considering what Esperanza had told him.

Despite the time it took nursing Petra, Esperanza had much time to brood. Night always fell so soon. The village was so dark and gloomy. The great mountains, the lofty volcanoes made Esperanza feel insignificant, impotent, all life so futile.

But she was happier when Petra began really to rally. Consistent medical treatment and care had turned the tables.

After about ten days, Chávez said she would undoubtedly recover.

Esperanza's eyes filled with happy tears. "You have been a real friend. You have saved her life. She is a good, old soul and deserves to live as long as she wants to. I shall never be able properly to repay you."

"Nonsense," he replied gruffly. He held her hand with lingering affection. "I've gotten more out of this trip than I've given. It has been a rare treat, if nothing else, to get to know you better."

He left minute instructions and went back to Mexico City.

Esperanza felt inconsolably lonely after he left. The dark nights of Milpa Verde closed around her tighter than ever. Their chill struck into her very heart.

Her thoughts were constantly centered on David. Her heart ached for him. But here she was in Milpa Verde. Was he still with Aurora?

She felt as though she had sealed herself up in a black tomb and was slowly starving to death.

LXVIII

One afternoon, as Esperanza was sitting in the front yard, a young woman in a smart, foreign riding habit rode past. She was attended by a Mexican groom.

The day, years ago, when Caldwell and Pepita had ridden into the hacienda, flashed into Esperanza's mind. A foreigner in these parts had long been a rarity.

In a delicate way, the girl was unusually pretty, a slim, winsome creature with dark eyes and fluffy chestnut hair. She seemed familiar—probably, thought Esperanza, someone she had seen in Mexico City.

The girl was speaking to the groom in English. He answered in stumbling accented words.

In a moment they had passed out of sight. The horses' hoofs could be heard climbing the stones toward San Benito.

Esperanza went inside to help Petra.

After a bit she heard horses' hoofs again, voices. Her name was called.

She went out. There at the gate were the girl and the man, still mounted.

He asked if she was Esperanza Huitrón, thereupon jumped off and helped the girl to dismount.

In a sweet friendly manner, she took Esperanza's hand and looked at her in an appealing manner which seemed to say: "Only you can help us."

Esperanza's heart went out to her at once.

The groom hastened to explain: "This is Miss Winifred Caldwell."

"Winifred!"

Esperanza's heart bounded. The girl she had once tended as a baby! All these years, Winifred had been a sort of beautiful image on the edge of Esperanza's conscious life. A thousand images rushed back. Now Esperanza knew why the girl had seemed familiar.

Winifred was surprised. "You know my name?" The groom translated.

"My child, I was your nurse."

As Esperanza spoke, she pictured the little creature, so tiny and blonde and quiet, lying in her cradle.

During those hard times for Esperanza and Luis, little Winifred, for Esperanza, had been a symbol of hope and beauty in life, a lovely creature of some world that might be.

Esperanza explained further: "Your father hired me to look after you—before he took you to the United States."

She thought; yes, there is some fleeting resemblance to the Pepita of the old days, a way of turning her head exactly the same, but none of her sullen arrogance.

Winifred looked at Esperanza searchingly and happily. "My father told me about you, though I never knew your name, or else forgot it. Then you can, you will, help me?"

"Of course, my child, what is it?"

Esperanza hurried to bring out some low, reed-bottom chairs.

"What a beautiful place this is!" cried Winifred. "And the air is so fresh!" She drew a deep breath.

"We, who were born here, find no place better," replied Esperanza.

Winifred leaned forward, her elbows on her knee, the palms of her gloved hands together. It gave her a sort of holy pose.

"There is something very mysterious about me," she said, almost musingly. "My father would never answer certain questions."

Her lips quivered. "For some reason, I have never had a real home like other girls. I always feel so alone, so different —"

"In a few months I am to be married to a fine young man from Denver, of a very good family. He has already asked me many questions about myself that I can't answer properly.

"Before I get married, I feel that I really ought to know. And I owe something, too, to the memory of my dead mother—to come to her grave. Of course, my father hasn't the slightest idea I'm here in Mexico."

She clasped her hands and looked forlorn.

Esperanza, shocked, recalled how Caldwell had wanted Winifred to believe her mother dead.

Winifred hastily continued. "I could never get out of my

father the name of the exact spot my mother was buried. But names of places in Mexico did slip out. I made notes of all of them.

"I have been down on Estrella. There's an old Spanish major-domo there, a nasty, suspicious character, obviously trying to hide something. I got your name from an old negress there named Josefina who worked for my father years ago.

"Tell me," she continued in an imploring tone, "if you can, just where my mother is buried; all you know; whom else I can see."

Esperanza was silent. Should she tell Winifred the truth? Surely she had a right to know about herself. She would probably find out anyway.

If Winifred did see Pepita, there would be no bond whatever; she could then go away content to forget her mother and her past.

"Your mother is not dead," she said simply.

"Not dead!" Winifred turned pale, then jumped up and clutched Esperanza's arm. "My mother is living? She's really living? Dont —"

Why had her father concealed the truth from her? Why had her mother never gotten in touch with her. A thousand questions came to her.

"Where does she live?" she asked in a tense tone. "Can I see her?"

"She is the wife of a storekeeper in Amecameca. I can tell you just how to get there."

"No, no, please come with me."

Esperanza hesitated. "The experience may not be pleasant."

"No?—I can't imagine—Why? Tell me, tell me the worst," implored Winifred.

Esperanza had suddenly realized she had made a terrible blunder—that strain of negro blood.

She tried to laugh. "Your mother is married and has many, many children."

Winifred looked relieved. "Well, that is an old custom hereabouts, isn't it?"

There was still time to get to Amecameca well before dark. Esperanza borrowed a neighbor's horse, and they set out.

Winifred plied her with a thousand questions.

Esperanza told her how her mother had looked when she was a girl, how prettily she had ridden beside Caldwell, how in love

with her he had been. Pepita's father, she told her, had been the unpleasant majordomo with whom Winifred had talked.

Winifred was nettled, then blanched.

"My grandfather!" she murmured, her eyes wide.

Esperanza's face wore a worried expression.

"You, too, are hiding something from me," Winifred cried out. "Everybody tries to hide things. I'm not an infant in arms."

Esperanza tried to soothe her.

Winifred's face set. "I begin to get it." She slashed her horse, and in that gesture was something of the former Pepita. "My father was never really married to Pepita."

Esperanza could not bear either to hurt or deceive Winifred. "Why—why—" she stammered.

"It's true then," said Winifred, in a terror-stricken tone.

Esperanza, touched, could not help lying.

"Your father," she added, "loved Pepita beyond all measure. He has never loved his present wife, and the only thing he loves in the world now is you. He would give up his own life for you, Winifred."

"And did mother love him?" Winifred asked in a low tone.

"I'm afraid not." Esperanza averted her face. "Her father, the old Spaniard, forced her on to your father. Your mother was only fourteen when you were born."

"Only fourteen! I knew she was young. Now I know why I am so frail and sometimes so full of nerves. But you, you aren't fooling me, Esperanza? It—it would be hard to tell the man I love that—that I am illegitimate—You see," she said, daubing at her eyes. "I love him more than anything in the world, more than my own life. I mean that."

Esperanza thought of her own youth when she had been so innocently in love with Luis.

"Why should you jump to any such conclusion? Anyway, men worth while, really in love, don't let anything stand in the way."

Winifred did not attempt to explain the bigotry of certain circles in American life.

"And what happened between my parents? Why did my father leave her?"

"He didn't. She ran off with the man who is her present husband."

"Poor father. Now I understand things better. He wanted to think of her as dead."

"I wouldn't be surprised," said Esperanza drily, "that he was rather fortunate she ran off."

She told Winifred about the experiences of her father on Estrella during the revolution, how he and she had been carried off by bandits.

Winifred was thrilled. "Well, I'm quite a heroine to have survived all that. I would never have believed it of myself."

They crossed the bridge into Amecameca.

Pepita still lived in the large, ramshackle adobe house near the railroad tracks.

The boy who opened the door said she was at the market, but would be back soon. They waited.

The parlor had a queer, damp mustiness of stale food and was cluttered with uncomfortable wicker furniture, frayed and broken. The inevitable porcelain flower-glazed spittoon took its proper place in a stiff circle of straight-back kitchen chairs. On the yellow-stained floor were several cheap native fiber rugs. In one corner stood a tall spindle-legged stand surmounted by a cracked dirty vase of faded fly-specked paper flowers. A bamboo wall rack was covered with picture postcards and intimate photographs. Esperanza came upon a small snapshot of Winifred's father.

Winifred, a puzzled expression on her face, sat with her hands folded tensely in her lap. She was examining the enlargements of family physiognomies in the corroded gold frames. Some were obvious Spanish types, knobby or long heads, arrogant determined features. Others revealed strange mixing of bloods. One face looked rather negroid.

Presently Pepita waddled in with packages concealed under her black silk *tápalo*.

Panting slightly from her walk, her large bosom heaving, her pudgy coarse features half vacant, half malevolent, she gave a startled suspicious glance at the two strangers and shrilled something.

A little boy, shabbily dressed, came and took her packages.

Pepita turned to her two guests. Her eyes, looking smaller than they were because of her puffy face, darted at them with a mixture of distrust, curiosity and obsequiousness, then relapsed into opaqueness.

"I am Esperanza Huitrón, and this is Winifred Caldwell."

Pepita gave a start. Her bosom heaved agitatedly. A wary expression spread over her face.

"In what way can I serve you?"

"Winifred has come a long way to see you."

Pepita made a pretense of surprise. "Yes? May I ask —"

Esperanza was irritated by her gross body, her vulgar features, her obvious intention to be even more stupid than she was.

"Winifred is your daughter."

Anger blazed in Pepita's face. "What do you mean? I have no daughter of this age." Her decided tone trailed off to a whine.

"Ask her," Winifred said through her interpreter, "if she was not born on the Estrella Hacienda, whether her father is not still majordomo there, whether she was not Caldwell's wife?"

Pepita's stupid features smouldered. "I am from Estrella, but of Caldwell I never heard."

Winifred wondered how her father could ever have been attracted by a woman so ignorant. The whole thing seemed utterly weird—to find her mother alive in this outlandish, upland Mexican town in these queer surroundings, in this dingy, cheerless house.

"You have never heard of him?" persisted Winifred sweetly.

Her tone—though the words were in English—caused Pepita to glance at her suspiciously, then swiftly at Esperanza.

"Oh, I heard of him," she replied blusteringly, "but I was only a little girl when he was there."

Winifred's impulse was to go. She would have spared herself a great deal. Instead, she walked over to the bamboo rack and took down the picture of her father.

"Why do you keep his picture here?"

Pepita became furious. "Why do you come nosing here? What business of yours is it whose picture I have around?"

Esperanza spoke sharply. "You may not know me. I am from Milpa Verde. We met when you came to the fiesta—the last one before the revolution—with Caldwell. As for your baby, here she is before you, but you disown her. You must be a very hard woman."

Pepita's dull mind dawned with the comprehension that she was making a fool of herself.

A cool, intelligent person might still have insisted on her point and have politely escorted her guests to the door. Instead she turned into a virago and shrieked.

Why, Esperanza wondered, did she take this irrational attitude? Her husband knew all about her and Caldwell. There was apparently no point in concealment or ill-will.

After a long sputter, Pepita said flatly, "Yes, if you must pry into my private life, I had a child by Caldwell, but it was killed in the revolution."

What a strange jumble of impulses. Caldwell had mentally killed Pepita. Mentally Pepita had killed her own child.

Winifred looked at the evil-tempered, ugly woman curiously. Deep as were her own emotions, hungry as she was to see and know her mother, she was openly disgusted, could hardly believe that this ill-shapen, ill-dressed shrew of slovenly sensuality had any relation at all to her own life. She would find out the truth, then leave.

"No one seems to like to be frank with me. My father told me that *you* had been killed in the revolution. I came here to look for your grave."

Again the woman shrieked. "Your father always was a liar, a liar, hear me. He says I'm dead, does he? Well, I'm dead for him, and he's dead for me. I always hated him, hated him, I tell you."

Winifred pulled on her gloves quietly.

"I am going—He always said you were the most lovely creature he had ever laid eyes on. I don't agree."

Dull as Pepita had become, flattered by this for a brief flash she felt her old pleasure at being admired by men. Her features worked as though made of putty being kneaded.

As unexpectedly as she had flown into a temper, she blubbered. "I—I'm sorry I've been so nasty—The surprise—It upset me —"

Her messy emotions were repugnant. Winifred opened her bag and took out a photograph.

"Years ago my father gave me this picture of you. Many times as a child I lay awake and kissed it again and again and cried and cried. It is lovely. I always had thought of my mother as the most lovely woman in the world. I so wanted a mother. I saw so little of my father. I have lived a lonely life. It is you, isn't it?"

The woman stared at it, hypnotized, her face knotted with inner pain. She bit her lips, and tears welled into her eyes and ran down her face, leaving paths through her powder.

Suddenly she jumped up and threw her arms about Winifred and sobbed.

"You *are* my daughter. I'm so sorry. Forgive me." She sobbed and sobbed.

But Winifred suddenly loathed this clay shape slobbering in her arms. The woman wasn't even clean. The collar of her dress was grimy. The creature's emotions, thoughts, character, were a shapeless mass.

Pepita released Winifred. She became suddenly as humble and respectful as she had been abusive. It penetrated her dull wits that her daughter, so well-dressed, so well-mannered, had become a superior person, belonging to a world far above her own.

A sly look trickled through her pudgy features. She began to scheme how this relationship could be turned to personal advantage.

"You must have tea, then stay for dinner and meet the family."

Winifred now merely wished to get away, to leave, to forget it all as some bad dream. Freed of the weight of mystery about her own past, she was free to be herself.

Into the parlor shuffled an old woman, bent over, hands gnarled, hair snow-white.

"My mother," said Pepita.

Esperanza and Winifred stared. The old woman blinked helplessly.

Pepita led her to a chair.

"This is your granddaughter," she shouted into her ear at the top of her lungs.

The old woman grinned toothlessly and nodded. She did not understand at all, merely sat there and stared and mumbled.

She was obviously a mulatto.

Winifred's face had turned pale as death. She shivered. A wild, lost look gripped her eyes.

She had had everything money could buy. She had gone to the best schools, had mingled with the best society. But here, suddenly, she was bound, by unbreakable bonds, by iron links, to this dirty hovel of a house in an alien land, to this family whose blood coursed in her veins.

Her whole world crashed about her. She grew dizzy.

"What is the matter? You look ill!" cried Esperanza.

Pepita ran out and came back with some water, all solicitude.

"Soon we shall have tea. Would you like to lie down a bit?"

Winifred gulped at the water. "I shall be all right," she said dully.

She sat there in a coma. She studied the old mulatto's countenance. The negroid portrait on the wall acquired complete meaning. In horror, she began searching herself, taking inventory, deciding what traits and features in herself came from her mother's side.

It was all she could do to keep from going into hysterics.

Presently Pepita's husband came in, alert, efficient, but jovial. Obviously he despised his wife.

Introduced, he was immediately friendly.

Winifred saw her nine half-brothers and sisters, as one by one they drifted in. Three showed a definite negro strain. One was even nicknamed "Negrito," a bright child who showed the whites of his eyes gleefully.

Winifred had to get away or scream. She excused herself from supper.

Outside in the air, she said to Esperanza, "For God's sake, take my arm."

She was quivering from head to foot. She sobbed and sobbed.

Presently she grew calmer, and they walked in silence along the dark, dirt sidewalk, past the empty-faced calcimined houses, through a Colonial arch and down to the Sacro Monte Hotel.

"You are a dear, sweet woman," said Winifred.

With the hopeless look of a soul completely beaten, she suddenly went alone into the room she had rented and closed the door.

LXIX

Esperanza put Winifred on the train early the following morning and went back to Milpa Verde.

There she found a telegram had been relayed to her.

I need you and must see you

DAVID

Perhaps, thought Esperanza, toying with the yellow sheet, absence had helped him again to appreciate her.

Her impulse was to pack up and fly, but she did not feel it right to leave Petra yet.

Though convalescing rapidly, Petra needed proper attention, which no villager could give her. Guadalupe, the only person

who could look after her, was not so well and besides had her own brood.

Too, meditated Esperanza, perhaps if this once she did not seem so anxious for a reunion, David might become worried a bit about her feelings.

She sent a messenger to Amecameca with a curt wire:

Unable to leave here till Petra better

David sent her a telegram every day. All he wanted, he told her, was to have her back.

A week later, she left for the city.

They were together again. She was more hopeful than she had been since the Aurora affair had started.

At the same time she was weary of it all.

"Let's go somewhere that we can be alone in peace," she suggested.

They went to the Zócalo and took an interurban train out to Xochimilco—that inland Venice of Mexico.

They had no desire to talk. Esperanza was merely glad to be with him in peace for a bit.

Outside the car windows, the landscape flew past—canals—false peppers—tall ash trees—magueyes—loaded burros—Indians—the truncated cones of the lower volcanoes.

David hired a flat-bottomed boat with multi-colored hood of canvas and flowers and tissue paper.

A silent Indian, with a long pole, propelled them over the low, smooth canals. They drifted under a stone arch and past wide patches of bright blue water lilies.

The Indian quickened his strokes. The boat shot between little islands of shining, sword-leaved corn and floating gardens of carnations and golden poppies. Perfume cloyed the warm, humid air.

Esperanza dangled her hand in the dark warm water, so sirupy and potential. Tiny water plants, with short white roots, clung to her fingers. The root-hairs stung her skin. She ran her tingling fingers down her own bare brown arm.

David smiled at her hazily.

"Let's not blunder again, David, for I ask nothing but what you want to give me freely."

Embarrassed, as if to head off conversation, he had the boatman

stop at one of the floating gardens. He just managed to reach a red carnation for her hair.

She looked at it for a moment. The bright flower seemed to symbolize the inner flame of life—warm, beautiful, brightly colored. Her own spirit, though, felt more confused than the heart of that carnation with its deeply serrated petals, for the flower held, in spite of its apparent complexity, a symmetrical arrangement, the eternal rhythm and antiphony of life. That—or at least so she felt—she had completely lost. There was no sense to anything.

They drifted into a wide break in the vegetation. The sun had wheeled toward its western descent. The light slid down the hazy mountains and silvered a motionless pond.

Three Indians struggled with an enormous fish net fastened to bamboo poles. Their voices floated dreamily across the placid waters, mingling with the booming song of an unseen bittern.

Oars splashed. Other boats slipped between the trees, workmen bound home from their floating gardens. Throaty songs drifted back, fading away dreamily.

The low roofs of the village shone through the glistening vegetation. Overhead, like raveled lace, stretched the fine filaments of yellow parasites, crimson climbers, tremulous air plants. Gnarled gourd-stalks withered before the glory of their own orange and brown shell-fruit. From arching branches hung long beards of moss; grapevines trailed the velvety water.

They returned to Mexico, half sad, half happy.

Then, just as Esperanza was beginning to feel they might in some way patch up their lives together and go on, David suddenly disappeared once more. The thing was getting ridiculous.

At this moment, Pedro came down with pneumonia. Esperanza rushed over to help Rosa.

At any rate this helped take her mind off her own troubles, especially as she had three or four days off at the Museum because of Lent holidays.

One afternoon, hurrying home from Rosa's, she bought a *Gráfico* and read that Caldwell that same afternoon was being given the "Order of the Eagle," the highest decoration of the government. He had also been appointed by his own government, that of the United States, as a special peace envoy to Europe. He was being swathed in honors.

She thought of poor Winifred, wondering where she had

gone—she had left no address—whether she had returned to the United States.

Everything bore down on Esperanza so heavily, she could not stand her empty apartment.

Run down from nursing Petra and now little Pedro, upset by her whole trouble with David, she felt as though she could not face the day, as though she could never face another day.

She had the sudden desire to see green trees and took a cab out to Chapultepec park. The place always soothed her.

The long lanes under the giant ahuehuatl trees and between the thick shrubbery, were laced with peaceful shadows. She walked along a half-hidden path beside the lake shore.

A flock of geese flew low over it, their yellow feet just breaking the dark surface, leaving a long streak of silver.

The afternoon rain began unexpectedly.

Esperanza took refuge under one of the big trees.

It was as dry there as though she had a roof over her head. The air was damp but fresh, and the drizzle, dappling the surface of the lake, filled her with a vague melancholy.

Perhaps centuries ago, Moctezuma, who had planted these giant trees, had sat in this very spot reading his multi-colored scrolls. Esperanza recalled the Aztec emperor's love for the pulque girl, Xochitl—"Flower" the word meant.

She heard voices.

To her dismay she recognized David's. He was with Aurora. They were quarrelling violently.

Esperanza, in a panic lest they should imagine she had been spying on them, jumped through the shrubbery and took refuge under another tree, out of sight.

They halted, worse luck, under the very tree she had just left.

David spread a paper down for Aurora in a niche of the big roots.

They quarrelled again. Aurora was unreasonably accusing him of indifference, of seeing Esperanza, of this, that and other things.

At first David defended himself, then fell silent and stared resentfully across the lake.

Aurora scolded and scolded until she scolded herself out, then gradually sputtered into silence.

Boys came splashing through the rain. They had made themselves gray wigs and long Druid-like beards from the gray Spanish

moss on the ahuehuetl trees. Gleelessly they slapped at each other with the long wet strands.

Aurora lightheartedly joked and laughed with them.

How, Esperanza wondered, could she so suddenly become gay after such a scene?

David still sat silent and moody. Suddenly he lifted his fist and drove it angrily against the rough bark of the tree.

Blood spurted from his knuckles.

Aurora gave a cry. "What have you done, David? Are you crazy? How ugly! *Ay de mí!*"

She bound up his hand, accompanying her deed of mercy with baby talk of affection for David.

Suddenly, before she had finished, he seized her and rained kisses over her mouth and face and hair.

She turned into a little savage and beat at him with her fists. "No, not here, not this way," she panted.

For reply, he grasped her wrists brutally, doubled them, bending her back, and held her close by main force, kissing her again and again full on the mouth with furious joy mingled with hatred.

Finally Aurora went limp in his arms, her mouth parted in passion, her body close against his.

"Come, come quickly," she panted, and they hurried away.

Esperanza waited, then rushed on around the base of high Chapultepec Castle and blindly took a street car.

In her absentmindedness, she had taken one bound for San Angel instead of for town.

Burning up with her dazed thoughts, gripped in a despair she had never known, she rode on and on to the end of the line.

The car, with its blurred windows, came back via Coyoacán.

For no reason at all, she got off there in a drizzling rain and walked through the plaza fronting the church.

Again she saw the two of them in violent embrace and suddenly recalled the terrible night, so long ago, that she had spent with Joaquín.

She walked on through the rain, stopped for a while under the broken arcades of the sacristy, staring into space, into the drizzle, seeing nothing.

She circled the churchyard, treading on the stone slabs of ancient graves—for this was the second church built on the mainland of America.

On one raised slab she looked at the carved relief of the hard savage face of an old Aztec God. The features resembled those of Rufo before he had become fat.

The rain came down harder. The stone features faded from her sight. She found herself staring into the inscrutable night, into the pouring rain.

A lone cactus stood up spiny and still above the high broken church wall.

She went home wet and miserable.

LXX

The next day, she had to go back to the Museum and take up the routine of her life again. She had a sniffly cold.

As she now spoke a little English, several days later she was assigned to accompany some distinguished American visitors out to the pyramids at Teotihuacán.

The people she was with, the necessity of explaining everything to them, for the moment took her mind off her own trouble.

But inevitably her thoughts would jump back to David.

And so, half in a daze, she walked through the vast ancient city of the dead. The sun, blistering, fairly shrieked as it zipped through the pale silk of the sky. The enormous sacrificial mounds loomed solid, unshaken after centuries, implacable above the seared upland plain and the long, shimmering reach of barren maguey fields. Smoke, here and there, curled up in the silent heat from the squalid adobe huts, like incense, as though the humble, broken sons of the ancient Toltecs still worshipped at the shrine of this ancient art.

From here, from the top of the Pyramid of the Sun, it was said, had come the stone image of Huitzilopochtli, now out at Magdalena.

She became moody. More and more, the Pyramid of the Sun typified her own bafflement—so solid, so brown, so massive. She pictured it stained with the blood of human victims. As she gazed, the hot sun flung a red glare into her eyes, and the pyramid seemed bubbling with the gory juice of victims.

Her nerves jangled. She wanted to hack at the pyramids with an axe, slice them through and through, destroy their mysterious immobility. They symbolized her present despair at having lost David, her inner inability to pierce the veil of life, to find any-

thing to satiate her present hopelessness. She wanted to hack at these heaps of stone and earth, to hurl thunderbolts against them, to powder them back to aboriginal dust. They were an affront in their timelessness, their mockery of the human scene and petty human optimism.

Had the early makers made them thus out of some great despair and fear? Was that why they recreated these emotions in the beholder?

Esperanza turned away, more than ever convinced of her personal impotence.

A little Indian girl, with braided hair, thrust ancient carved stones under her nose.

Esperanza bought a grinning face in jade, an Oriental slant in its eyes. It mocked her, jeered at her own intensity, as though the artist who had put this glow of bitterness into this imperishable bit of polished green stone had, somehow or other, in his own day, inured himself to the thankless task of living, had learned to ask nothing—nothing whatsoever of the great mystery—a stoical, god-like grin on that exotic primitive face, a stoical half-mad reckless endurance as shakeless in its subtle miniature strength as the vast pyramids themselves.

Hurrying back to town, she rushed over to Rosa's.

Pedro, she was relieved to discover, was much better.

She stayed all night.

"You are tired, mother," said Rosa. "You must take better care of yourself."

Esperanza laughed a bit hysterically.

The following morning at breakfast, she found a note from David.

Feeling ill and irritable, she exploded angrily. "It's getting utterly ridiculous."

But deep within her was that same spark of hope, and also fear. This might be really the final message.

She opened the letter.

He must see her at ten o'clock without fail in the Café Colón. It was very imperative. He had been to her apartment yesterday three times and last night had not found her.

"Anyway, eat your breakfast in peace," said Rosa. "Here's a paper."

It was the *Universal*. Esperanza unrolled it.

Bold headlines announced:

AMERICAN GIRL COMMITS SUICIDE
RELATIVE OF AMBASSADOR TAKES OWN LIFE
POLICE BUSY SEEKING EXPLANATION

Winifred was dead!

How much more just if Caldwell had committed suicide instead of Winifred! But the world didn't go that way.

Esperanza was terribly affected. She had known Winifred only as a baby and finally for a brief twenty-four hours during her young womanhood. But somehow, Winifred had always lived in Esperanza's imagination as something splendid, far above the common run. Esperanza, herself, at a moment when she had been a poor outcast, had gazed upon the little blonde girl in her cradle, so finely cared for, as a sort of princess from a fair world. Caldwell's frequent glowing allusions to her had helped build up in her mind a continuation of that early impression of beauty and splendor. And then, so many years later, when Winifred had come into her life again, she had really seemed a splendid creature, almost from another planet.

But it seemed that the good, the fine, those who express the highest attributes of humanity, are the ones marked for suffering and tragedy and failure. How noble Winifred had seemed! So fine and precious!

But just as Caldwell, in his ruthless greed for success, for money, had destroyed what was best in himself, so he had unwittingly destroyed her. In a sense she was destroyed when she was born. If he had left her on the Estrella plantation she might have found a normal, happy place in life. But he had tried to make her something she couldn't become. She had been worthy of all he had done; it was the world and its narrow race prejudices which were unworthy of her.

Hastily, her fingers shaking, Esperanza read on down the column. Winifred had left a note. Life held no further hope for her. She requested that her "uncle," George Howell Caldwell, in this city, be advised, that through him her father, Gregory Caldwell, be notified. She had been decent enough not to uncover his secret. That was like her.

Winifred had also left a note for her fiancé in Denver. She loved him more than ever. She had taken this step entirely for

his sake, not wishing to ruin his life. Her death was the only solution.

What a terrible state, thought Esperanza, Caldwell must be in. Winifred was the only thing that really counted in his life. His pride in her beauty, her brightness, her education, was boundless; his hopes for her infinite.

And here she had killed herself. She was dead.

He must have a good idea why Winifred had taken her own life, must in fact, be feeling the whole guilt for her suicide. And irony of ironies, the previous afternoon at the Foreign Office, the decoration of the Order of the Eagle, with much *éclat*, had been pinned on his coat at more or less the moment when she had killed herself.

All his honors must be ashes in his mouth. He must now be an empty shell of an automaton with a glittering medal on his chest.

Hurriedly Esperanza read on. When Caldwell left the reception, the reporters had pounced upon him. Thus had he learned of the suicide of his "niece."

Shocked beyond words, Esperanza hurried on to her apartment to change her clothes before seeing David.

There she found a messenger patiently waiting for her.

Another note.

She tore it open, imagining that after all David had changed his mind.

Half hysterical, she read that Caldwell wanted to see her. If she could come at once, she would be doing him the finest favor of his life.

But her engagement with David? What should she do?

She thought of José. She wanted José to get the job of which Caldwell had spoken so they could be together again. She knew that her brother, if it did not conflict with his principles, would be happier there than up in San Antonio in a foreign country.

And Caldwell had always helped her when she needed him. He had sent Dr. Chávez to Guadalupe. He had bought David's pictures. He had gone with her to protest to Chief of Police Maceo in behalf of Mercedes.

But David was waiting.

She read Caldwell's note again. If she would come, the chauffeur would bring her in the car to the house.

Winifred dead! What a state Caldwell must be in!

Her own woes seemed insignificant.

David could wait as he had so often made her wait. It could not make any deep difference whether she saw him then or a bit later.

When the chauffeur left her at Caldwell's, she gave him a hastily scribbled note to take to David at the Café Colón, in the hopes that he might wait for her.

She was ushered into Caldwell's study.

He looked worn and broken.

"I had to see you," he said, taking her two hands warmly. "You are one of the few persons who know the whole truth about Winifred. It must not get out. You must promise me you won't say a word to a soul."

He is thinking about his reputation, his false honors, thought Esperanza savagely.

She replied stiffly. "I have always been discreet with your wife, Ida, everybody."

"I know, you are loyal and wise. But a chance word in some thoughtless quarter—I cannot have this matter upset my wife. Also I have to think of Ida. And it would ruin my public career."

A terrible contempt for him surged over Esperanza. More than of Winifred and her good name, he was worried about his own success, about himself. What a net of lies he had wrapped around his life!

"You will be careful, won't you," he persisted, pleadingly.

"There is," she said, almost viciously, "not the slightest reason for you to worry."

He sat motionless as death, then in a low monotone began talking about Winifred.

"Don't think that I care very much about myself in this. That is not why I asked you to be cautious. Whatever front I may preserve, I am a ruined man, do you hear, a ruined man?"

His voice rose with a touch of hysteria. He gripped the table edge, and his shoulders shook.

He bit his lips, and in a softer tone, struggling to keep the quavers out of his voice, he said: "She was all I had, absolutely all. Life has no meaning whatever without her. Look!"

He held out his new official decoration, with its gold glitter, its diamonds and red and green ribbon.

"This is piffle, nonsense, a sham. I would like to hurl it out the window."

He snapped the lid back on the velvet box. "I will never wear

it. Look at me. I have made money. I have achieved honors, enviable recognition, but now it all means nothing, absolutely nothing."

He slouched forward, his head in his hand.

He was sincere, yet there was a queasy note of self-pity.

He went on. "One reason I wish this whole secret buried is because of my wife and Ida. I feel that if I play fair with them from now on, Winifred, if she were alive and knew, would be pleased by it. They are the only ones I can in some way compensate for my past mistakes."

He sat silent, staring straight ahead, his shoulders slightly stooped.

Esperanza was too deeply moved to say anything.

Toño de la Selva was announced.

Esperanza got up to go.

"You know him," said Caldwell, wishing to cling to her a bit longer. "Wait a bit."

Toño came in. He bowed, uttered the usual Mexican formalities, then waxed more confidential.

He had become a believer in the transmigration of souls and began seriously to comfort Caldwell on this basis.

But Caldwell did not seem to take kindly to the possibility that Winifred might come back in the shape of a chicken or a monkey.

Toño looked better and more dapper. He was glowing with inward happiness. He could contain the news no longer.

"Mr. Caldwell, of course you know my cousin Marta Sandoval?"

Caldwell jerked violently, cleared his throat.

"Yes, yes, to be sure."

"We have been in love a long time," continued Toño. "We are going to get married."

Again Caldwell cleared his throat. "Well—Well—That's fine. Fine. I congratulate you. She is a very noble and beautiful woman. I am sure you will be happy."

He looked haggardly at Esperanza.

No more inopportune announcement, she thought, could have come at a more ironical and terrible moment.

Caldwell asked Toño's permission to speak to Esperanza alone for a second.

"Marta," he told her, "also knows the truth about Winifred, but we are no longer on very good terms. I sometimes think she

would even enjoy injuring me. Could you—Could you persuade her to be discreet?”

Esperanza promised.

Caldwell hesitated. “My wife is upstairs. Ida is out, in fact she went to see Rosa. But—well, perhaps it is just as well you don’t see them today. Come over again in a few days—we’ll be leaving in a week or so—and have tea.”

Esperanza and Toño left together.

Outside, she said to him, “I’m awfully glad you and Marta are getting married.”

“She’s fine!” he said, enthusiastically.

“She certainly is. She has suffered. She deserves all happiness.”

“How has she suffered?” demanded Toño.

Esperanza bit her lip. Toño obviously knew nothing of her past relations with Caldwell.

“What do you mean?” persisted Toño.

“Marta is such a loyal person. The loss of her mother —”

“Oh!” exclaimed Toño airily. “Between you and me, that was a good thing. The old lady was a caution. She was just too exalted for this world and managed to make Marta consistently unhappy.”

Toño rattled on to Esperanza about new business plans. One was a project for bottling some miraculous Cuixtlac health water.

The more Esperanza thought of Toño and Marta getting married, the better it seemed.

But as Toño chattered on, Esperanza scarcely listened any longer. Her personal pain was creeping back into her heart.

David, she knew, would no longer be at the Colón.

They parted, and as Esperanza entered the convent, the bantam janitor stopped her, his eyes wide, and whispered.

“There’s a gentleman waiting, very anxious to see you. He was jumping out of his skin. Say —”

David! her heart cried. She hurried on in under the vaulted corridor.

It was Tirso Bardo. He wanted to know all about Caldwell’s niece, and he was sure Esperanza had the low-down. The whole thing was queer.

He had been a good friend, but for once Esperanza could not help him and managed to send him off thinking that she really knew nothing.

She rushed on in and found notes from both Rosa and David.

Perhaps because of some instinct of desiring to postpone bad tidings, she tore open Rosa's first.

Pedro had had a serious relapse. His condition was desperate. Dr. Chávez had been called. Would she come at once?

She was so upset, she stuffed David's note into her handbag and rushed out to get a taxi.

Nervously she gripped the seat and told the driver to hurry. She rushed in. Rosa fell into her arms sobbing.

Dr. Chávez was with the baby. He came out a moment later to ask for something. His face was grave. "Come in."

Pedro lay with a pallid congestion in his face.

"We shall know in a bit," said Chávez and told them to please leave the room.

Rosa gripped Esperanza's hand and watched the door.

Rafael came rushing in. He took Rosa in his arms and tried to comfort her.

Presently Chávez came out. He nodded to Rosa. "Come. The crisis is over."

A little later, he told Rafael and Esperanza they could go in. "He's pulling through, I think—This confounded altitude—It's a miracle —"

Pedro, now looking wasted and pale and ice, was breathing more easily and sleeping.

Chávez motioned them all to go out.

Rosa wept with joy. Rafael held her in his arms. A happy tear trickled down his cheek.

Esperanza saw Chávez to the door. She had never happened to be at Rosa's when he had previously come to see Pedro. He had not been up to the Museum for a long time. They hadn't seen each other since Milpa Verde. Now, she noticed, his face was thin; he looked unhappy.

"You look as though you ought to be taken care of yourself," she scolded him, "instead of other people."

He stopped and looked straight ahead into the morning sunlight.

"Well, I guess you know what the trouble is," he said curtly.

"Marta, of course."

He nodded and tightened his lips.

"I'm sorry, terribly sorry," she said.

"You're having your troubles, too," he said gruffly, and hurried out.

Esperanza stayed and helped the servant get lunch.

Not until she was half through her meal did she remember David's note.

Well, she had waited this long, she would wait a few minutes longer till she could be alone, not bring her own woes up at such a time as this.

Right after lunch, she hurried out and at the first corner opened the note.

David had waited for her an hour at the Café Colón, then when he received the note from the chauffeur had gone to her apartment.

He'd been there twice, finally had left this note.

He was going away on the two o'clock train for Guadalajara, so he could get away from Aurora and try to settle his problem in peace. He wanted desperately to see Esperanza before he left.

She glanced at her wrist watch. Ten minutes to two. There wasn't a chance in the world of making it.

Perhaps she could intercept the train at Tacubaya. Even if she were lucky, she would only have half a second to see him.

Well, perhaps, it was better he went off this way without seeing her again. Let him work it out by himself. He was surely capable of discovering the road of his own happiness.

Still as the days passed, she could not quiet her conscience for having let him go off without a farewell. And as still more days passed and no word came from him, she upbraided herself still more.

LXXI

Each day now Esperanza dragged herself up to the Museum.

She visited Mrs. Caldwell and Ida before they went north. Again Caldwell, looking unbelievably aged, told her he would look up José.

Winifred's body had been shipped off to the States.

Esperanza moved to cheaper quarters. The other apartment had long strained her budget. She had kept it because of the hope that David would return.

But now no word at all came from him.

Soon José wrote that Caldwell had seen him, but that he couldn't accept his offer.

"I can't forget how he double-crossed us in Milpa Verde. And I'll be damned now if I'll pull his chestnuts out of the fire, save

his property and queer myself with my own people. I haven't such a hot job here, but I'll drag along. Fortunately Adelita likes it here. "So I told Caldwell off quick, damned quick. The old duffer looks about done —"

She went to the wedding of Marta and Toño in Santa Brigida. Marta really looked lovely and happy. Esperanza could hardly believe that she was a year older than herself.

Esperanza was glad. Yet, in a way it seemed very pathetic, their marriage. Marta, once beautiful beyond words, who could have had her pick of men, had waited the best years of her life, infatuated with a man who could never really be hers, who could only bring her tragedy and suffering. And now she was marrying her cousin, Toño.

Esperanza liked him very much indeed, but he was a queer fish, interesting, but somehow with his odd superstitions and disconnected thoughts and purposes, not quite an integrated male.

Esperanza called on them at their new home in San Angel, near the Inn and overlooking a pleasing sweep of lawn.

Toño told her that the Cuixtlac health water would be on the market soon, the most marvelous elixir ever discovered. He would send her a case, and she would discover eternal youth.

"And who would desire such a calamity as eternal youth," she demanded, half-smiling.

"Well, I would," he replied astonished. "Especially now I'm just married." He grinned.

Toño had also turned into an antiquarian and was trying to prove something or other about the equinoxes in relation to Aztec chronology.

Esperanza's life now moved through a deadly monotony. She went to her work in the Museum, came home, sewed on her clothes, read a bit, went to bed.

Her classes at the university were over. She had learned much.

But now an eternal weariness weighted her down. Ambition went out of her. Only after the revolution when she did not know where Luis or José were had she felt so utterly tired of things.

She had no desire whatever to go anywhere or do anything. She no longer went to the Café of Cartoons, or the vegetarian restaurant, certainly not to the Federation, now ridden by petty cliques. All the old contacts aroused too painful memories. Life was a dull, meaningless round.

She did, for a time, see more of Rosa and her children. But

presently Rosa and Rafael moved to Monterrey, and another gap was left in her life.

Finally a letter, mailed from Irapuato, came from David.

Aurora had gone along with him to Guadalajara!

Esperanza dropped the letter, angry, hurt, disgusted. How lucky she had not tried to catch the train in Tacubaya! She had been spared that humiliation.

She read on: "This is the final decision. It has to be. This can't go on. I need you both, but it seems the world is not built that way, nor is Aurora."

The last was stupidly cutting. The letter fell from her fingers again. Dazed, she curled up on the couch and wept until night enfolded the room.

She got up and dashed water in her face. She ought to eat some supper. Instead, she merely lay weakly down again.

So long as he had told her he cared for her, she had struggled for his love.

Hope now faded away from her completely.

Evidently Aurora had learned he was going and had followed the same tactics as at Montevideo; she had gone along.

Bother anyway! That scene in the park had cut her to the depths. She never expected now ever really to get over that. It had killed part of her feeling for him forever. It had put hate into her soul.

For the first time now she was bitter, deeply bitter, against him. How, she railed, could David, an idealist, a man with noble instincts, a man who stood for the betterment of humanity, commit an injury of this sort against her? Wasn't she even a human being?

She had given him the best of her life, and he had cast her aside. Women were less enduring physically than men. She had little left, she felt, to offer any man. She would have to face personal loneliness all the rest of her life. Self-pity welled up in her.

But promptly she pushed this idea that he owed her anything aside as unworthy. Their relation had not been based upon any such narrow concept of duty, but of complete freedom. It was not right for anyone to ask another to sacrifice himself in life's lottery.

In this mood, she replied to his letter. She was glad he had

found happiness—He was not to feel any remorse—They would always be good friends; Aurora, too, she hoped.

It was easy to be noble—on paper. But when she laid aside the pen and had sealed the envelope, she sank down limply on the couch again and brooded.

A knock on the door. Her heart jumped—Could it be?—Impossible!

She opened. Julia was standing there, smiling inanely.

At that second, for no reason at all, Esperanza recalled Bobo's curious remark: "You are a beautiful clay pot for home fires," and to Julia she said gaily, "Come in and behold a cracked pot."

Julia caught sight of her reddened eyes. "Your metaphor is evidently correct. Come, Esperanza, you've got to snap out of all this. David's no good any more. He's gone to pieces inside—When that happens —"

She dragged Esperanza out to a violin concert.

"It's Esperón. Remember, the one who married the glorious blonde, Chabela Graña?"

"At David's party."

"Well, with her money and connections and vibrant personality, she's pushed him up the ladder fast. He's really good, though."

Julia thereafter was a jewel. She seemed to know exactly what was going on inside Esperanza. She went out of her way to look her up frequently at the Museum or her apartment. After much insistence each time she made Esperanza go out to a show, or go shopping, or come to little gatherings in her house.

"What you need is a new hat!" she would exclaim, and drag Esperanza out to buy one.

"You have to think about yourself a bit," she scolded. "You may lose your job at the Museum any day. How do you suppose you got it. Because of David, who had political influence. The first thing you know, a new head of the bureau will be appointed, and he will want your job for one of his mistresses, and then, no matter how much you know or how well you have done your work, out you will go."

At the moment, it didn't seem to matter so much to Esperanza, though she wondered just what she would do.

"In any event," concluded Julia, "you can always count on a job with me to tide you over."

Esperanza pressed her hand in gratitude.

Chávez was also very nice to her. He came any number of times to take her out. Once they drove clear to the Contreras Gap.

"In a way, we're in the same boat," he told her a bit lugubriously.

"I know —"

"If any time your Museum job blows up, I could employ you; in fact, if you'd like a change now—it might do you good—I've a lot of materials needing classifying and there's a lot of information you could gather for me."

She thanked him warmly. "You're a dear if ever there was one. But not right now, thanks. Perhaps later. I've got to drift until I decide a few things."

LXXII

One day Esperanza ran into Elena, the girl of the Vamos de Nuevo cantina. She had acquired a majestic bulk, but was still working in the Peravillo cabaret. She showed the wear and tear of late hours and drinking, but was jolly, and did not seem to think life had done her wrong, quite the contrary. She was saving her money to some day buy a tiny store in her home town in Chiapas and take it easy.

Everyone, however battered by life, had a dream, a goal, something that beckoned. Esperanza had nothing.

Elena made Esperanza come home with her—a double flat with a big sunny room—in a new building though in a poor quarter beyond the Preparatory School. She suggested that Esperanza take the other half, the rent was modest.

Esperanza looked out the window. There was an unobstructed view of the volcanoes. Those mountains seemed like old friends on whom one could lean in trouble.

This decided her. She moved in.

Weeks drifted by. Months. She felt old, looked older. Her health was bad. Her stomach gave her constant pain. She got out of bed in the mornings by sheer will. Her brain commanded; her body obeyed protesting. Her will was a corkscrew that ground into her body and then yanked her forth, unwilling, to her daily tasks.

Chávez looked her over carefully, ordered an x-ray, found nothing.

"It's mostly up here," he said, tapping his head. "The cure for that is change, not rest but new interests, a reason for living. Forget David—Take the job I offered you."

She went out, suddenly unstrung, tears in her eyes—New interests—when one didn't want interests, when life itself was without further interest—The job he offered—she had told him it wouldn't be fair to either of them, and that was the truth.

Chávez had also told her she needed to mix with people, but she shrank from people. If she didn't mix, though, she would merely grow more unattractive, dowdy, useless. But aside from her fellow employees in the Museum, Matilda, Chávez, Julia Patterson and Elena, she saw no one except now and then for a second's chat on the streets.

Occasionally she got a letter from Guadalupe. Such letters, with their brief notes about the village, always made her vaguely restless.

The village was still expecting lands, but nothing had happened yet. The school was still closed. This, after more than twenty years of violence and bloodshed and battle for the rights of the people!

The village. The smell of growing corn came back to Esperanza's nostrils. She remembered especially the spring time, when the old men, the wise men, of the village, all the keepers of supernatural knowledge, sat down in holy caves to a banquet of tiny calabash seeds and succulent roots and in low voices determined the fate of the tender corn shoots, at that time of the year, freshly mantling with delicious green the drab earth between the gray stone outcroppings.

But though Esperanza thought of these things, she plodded along in Mexico City.

Constantly she had strange dreams. One night she dreamed of Bobo being chased by a strange man looking like a smoke-stack, with piston arms. Just as Bobo was about to be caught, he turned into a maguey plant, an odd double-rooted plant. Naturally his pursuer detected this oddity, and the plant, resuming Bobo's face, waddled off rapidly on its two stalks. Again, about to be caught, Bobo ducked into a cornfield and turned into a growing corn plant, again with double roots. Once more he was detected.

He jumped over a fence and turned into a live turkey cock. This time he was detected because he spread his tail feathers so much wider and gobbled so much louder than the others. To escape, he flew over another fence and turned into a grinding stone. The surprised housewife there, started to carry it into the

house, but it proved so light and suddenly emitted sparks, that frightened she threw it over the fence.

It hit a man on the head. The man proved to be Lorenzo. He fell with a groan, moaning, "He speaks! He speaks!"

Out of his mouth hopped a green toad. The green toad—with Bobo's head—hopped and hopped until he reached a pool. The iron man ran after him, just missed clutching him on the edge, then stared angrily into the pool.

Esperanza, in the form of a clay pot, came up to him to plead for Bobo and discovered the iron man was David.

But though she pleaded, his iron face merely looked at her harshly. He said he would drain the pool and kill the freak. He fell on his face and began lapping up the water. She tried to pull him back.

Just then an entrancing young woman, mostly naked, with green eyes and a lascivious mouth, threw her arms about David. They went away together, forgetting about her and Bobo entirely.

Bobo leapt out of the pool lightly, now back in his dwarfish shape, but clad in a frog's skin, and shouted, "Whooooee!" after the vanishing pair.

Esperanza fell to weeping, and Bobo put his arms about her tenderly.

Later, she realized that her dream was a hodge-podge of reading of native legends in her work at the Museum, but just now she woke up with a scream.

The light in her room was on, flooding her eyes. A figure was standing by her bed.

Esperanza gave another scream.

It was Elena and blood was trickling down her forehead.

She swayed there at the foot of the bed drunkenly.

Esperanza jumped out. "Elena! You're hurt!"

"Snothing," said Elena, hiccupping. "Go to bed. I'll be all right."

Esperanza led her back into her own apartment and hurriedly helped her to undress.

Elena's enormous breasts floated on the rolls of fat that covered her stomach. Her fat legs bulged above her garters.

Esperanza got the alcohol stove going to heat water. Elena had a mean gash in her head, fortunately in the scalp, not on her face. Pieces of broken glass were still sticking in wounds in her chest.

Esperanza carefully picked out the glass and bathed all her wounds carefully, disinfecting them with alcohol. She bound up Elena's head.

"What on earth happened?" she demanded.

Elena—some of her tipsyness had passed—rolled her head from side to side and mumbled.

Her little black kitten, which had gotten up on the bed, daubed its paw at one of her long, swinging red earrings.

"Jus' a fight," she said, with a deep sigh. "Laura tried to cut in on my friend Vicente, and we got angry, and she threw a heavy beer glass at me."

Vicente—the cabaret manager—had gotten them both out in a hurry before the police came.

Esperanza left Elena in bed, moving her head and mumbling, half asleep, half drunk. She turned out the light and crept back to her own apartment.

Poor Elena, she thought. Here I'm indulging in self-pity; she really is in a blind alley. But she doesn't pity herself a bit. She doesn't ask foolish questions of fate.

Elena, good-natured though she was, had had other rumpuses in the café, hair-pulling matches, deep scratches. She had often exchanged blows with unpleasant customers.

Esperanza could understand how such fights happened. Jaded minds and bodies on the dark border of emptiness, were bound to flare up into irrational violence. The defeated body made a last effort, but the control was gone. Alcohol made things worse, and only a vague chaos of uncontrollable emotions remained. Incoherent fights were the result.

Esperanza had also heard of Vicente. Elena adored him, and he exploited her, one of the reasons she had been able to hold her job.

All women, even the basest, need love. They sought to purchase back the love they sold so vilely to men, evil or needing physical relief. Such women could purchase it only from brazen cowardly types like Vicente.

Even so, Elena's love for Vicente, just because it was so hopeless and uncertain, was fiercer than the love any good woman could give a good man. It was desperate, all-consuming, more necessary than life. It was love based on fear, because bought love is never secure.

A parallel, Esperanza hastily thought, could be drawn through all the professions where men and women prostitute their talents.

On another occasion, Elena got into a more serious rumpus and was sent to jail for a month.

Twice a week, Esperanza went to see her.

Elena was furious at Vicente, whom she felt had let her down, for it was one of his obligations to see she didn't get into jail.

David, Esperanza had heard, had come back to town—without Aurora, who had run off with another painter.

In a lonely moment, Esperanza sent him a note. She waited and waited, but he didn't answer or look her up.

She heard that he was painting frenziedly on his new fresco. She imagined that he, too, having lost Aurora, must be a little desperate and lonely, especially being out of the Federation.

That organization was going its own sweet way to ruin. The government was getting harsher, the lines tauter.

A chauffeurs' strike was on. Its leaders were arrested, the movement broken. Eventually those arrested were sent off to the Islas Mariás without trial.

Those who did not belong to the official government party could expect no tolerance. More and more arrests occurred.

Elena got into more trouble. She feared Vicente would throw her out. Since her last fracas, he had been very offish. This made her temper uncertain.

Esperanza realized, too, that Elena was worried because she was growing misshapen and was no longer very attractive. Her best customers now were men too drunk to notice her physical deficiencies.

And so one night, in a drunken rage, when a man refused to pay for all the beer he had drunk, she flung high, nasty words at him.

He drew his knife and slashed her badly across the face and breasts.

She flung a beer bottle into his face.

It smashed. Eventually he lost an eye.

They were both arrested and put in the jail ward of the emergency hospital.

LXXIII

Esperanza went to see Elena at the hospital.

Elena peered from her bandages good-naturedly. After a while she cursed Vicente.

"That yellow-belly hasn't even come near me. He's afraid."

"What will happen?" asked Esperanza.

"Oh, they'll give me the limit, I guess—Doesn't much matter. I did sort of want to go back to Chiapas and settle down, but what the hell?"

As if Elena's trouble was not enough, David was suddenly arrested and taken, not to jail, but directly to the penitentiary.

This was serious; it indicated he might be sent to the *Islas Mariás* penal colony without trial.

Though he had not answered her note, Esperanza went to see him.

The big brick building with its pacing guards, rifles on their shoulders, made her heart sink.

She was admitted through the steel doors into the center of the star-shaped tiers of cells and was led to a wing where she was permitted, as David's wife, to see him in a screened room alone.

He greeted her jovially, seemingly quite indifferent regarding what might happen to him.

"It's all in the game. You are a jewel to come to see me. I don't deserve it. I did intend looking you up after I got your note."

"What has happened?" she asked. "I thought you were quietly painting."

"So I am. But they are coming down on all the Federation people, and they remembered me and probably didn't even know I was kicked out. Besides I just signed a petition urging the government to give the strike leaders a fair trial and denouncing it for shipping them off to the islands."

"But you are painting for the government."

"Governments aren't really interested in æsthetics, dear Esperanza."

"But why didn't you let well enough alone? After the way the Federation treated you, why should you stick up for them?"

"Of course, you don't mean that. Honest men shipped off to prison without trial—that is reason enough for protest."

"Naturally—you are right."

"To be frank, though," continued David, "I didn't expect this. I fear that dirty politics is mixed up in my arrest. Clemente has been very jealous of my new commission to paint —"

"Surely, he wouldn't —"

"Oh, he wouldn't?" scoffed David. "A painter scorned is worse than a woman scorned. But, of course, the main source of

my arrest is Rufo. He has seen his chance at last to get me. Since the fresco and the mine strike and the various exposés in *The Struggle* he has been waiting for just this opportunity."

"But you have so many friends and plenty of influence ——"

"The friends I have are not strong with the present authorities. The game has changed. This new crowd of grab and plunder want to be cocks of the roost. I'm expecting the works."

"What can I do for you, David?"

"Come to see me. That's a godsend and more than I deserve."

"I still love you, David, and my love asks nothing."

He looked away, moved. "I know, Esperanza. I wish I could go on with you. But somehow that cycle is finished. You are a grand person, but ——"

She fought back her tears. "Anyway, I can help you while you are locked up here. That is a privilege. Is there anything you want?"

"I have no right to call on you for anything," he said, stubbornly.

"Nonsense. I'm helping a poor woman locked up who once befriended me. She means little to me compared to you."

He named a few things she could get from his quarters.

The next morning when she went to the hospital to see Elena, who should walk into the room in nurse's costume but Henriette Cheval.

"You won't remember me," said Esperanza. "I'm from the Hacienda Magdalena."

The French woman started, looked at her sharply, then said, "I would like to speak to you before you go."

She went out with a brisk professional air, shaking a thermometer.

Esperanza could not get over the changed bearing of the woman, whom she remembered so vividly that cold drab morning of her grandfather's death and later in Cuatemotzín street.

Henriette took Esperanza to her room, a simple little cubicle.

On the wall was a big crucifix and sacred pictures; over the bed a statue of Our Lady of Olives. There were many books, nearly all of them religious tomes, lives of the saints and such things.

Henriette's face had taken on a peaceful expression of humility.

"I read that you were to be deported," began Esperanza.

Henriette's lips curled. "There are ways some women can get

out of things. Let's not talk about it. My life has changed. Long ago I used to know something about nursing. I have taken it up again. I am trying to be good, to make up for misspent years. I have found a sort of peace."

"I'm glad," said Esperanza simply.

Henriette pulled off her cap and threw it beside her on the little iron bed. She was still a very handsome woman.

Leaning forward, elbows on her knees, she clasped her hands.

"There is something, since you are from Magdalena, I would like to ask you about. Do you know what became of a foreman there, Luis—Luis Cardona? Later he was head of revolutionary troops."

"He is dead. He was killed during the Tragic Ten Days."

"Dead!" Sorrow filled Henriette's face. "Dead. I thought—" she stammered. "I had hoped that in some way I might do something for him."

A far-away look came into her face. "He was the only man with whom I ever had a truly disinterested relation. But then he was the only man who ever treated me in a decent fashion as a human being."

Esperanza's ideas swirled about. So it was Henriette with whom Luis had had relations when she was having a child.

Or had it been earlier? Had it begun on the hacienda? Had she been merely a silly child, seeing nothing all the time? The idea shocked her.

Henriette went on to tell how Luis had helped her that terrible morning in the salón, how later she had run into him in Mexico City and they had become intimate friends.

Esperanza felt a load lifted from her heart—it had been later, then, that Luis had been unfaithful.

Henriette sat for a moment, very still, her hands clasped. "Dead, why didn't some of the others die?"

"Some did. Many died," said Esperanza, looking at Henriette curiously.

How she herself had suffered those days in Mexico, knowing Luis was unfaithful to her! And so it was with this woman.

But it all seemed remote now, the pain gone, just a scar—a welt on the tree of life, an old wound long since healed.

"Yes, many died!" she repeated softly.

Henriette started. "Yes—Poor Sasha. You knew her? She was with me that morning in the salón of the hacienda—She's here

in the hospital—quick cancer of the womb—No, not a chance—And—” Her face hardened. “Joaquín died. But that, God forgive me, was no great loss.”

She glanced up at the crucifix and clasped her hands. Then she turned to Esperanza, impulsive. “Tell me something about Luis Cardona.”

“He was my husband.”

Henriette’s face convulsed with dismay. “Oh, I’m so sorry.”

She crushed her fingers to her mouth. “I didn’t know. I shouldn’t —”

“It doesn’t matter now, not in the slightest. If you gave him some little happiness before he died, I am glad.”

Henriette fell on her knees before Esperanza and laid her head in her lap.

“Forgive me, my friend. I have done many wicked things. I am trying to atone. I am not all evil. Tell me I am not.”

“Of course I forgive you.”

What a strange metamorphoses, thought Esperanza—this Henriette trying to save her soul.

“Perhaps,” she continued, “it was through Luis that you were changed. I should like to think that, for I thought him good and still think him so.”

Henriette looked at her startled. “I rather despised him at the time. I couldn’t then really appreciate anything but cruelty and braggadocio in men. But somehow the thought of him always remained with me—Perhaps for once I sought to give rather than receive —”

Esperanza’s thoughts raced on. This woman, who had once flaunted herself so proudly, who had known the lap of luxury, who had been so greedy and self-centered—here she was working hard in a hospital where came mostly dregs, where she received little, and would never be remunerated beyond her pay by well-to-do patients.

Was it that she was getting on in years and had no other resources?

But Esperanza recalled that in the old days the peasants of Milpa Verde had said it was strange how holy such a wicked woman acted. Evidently Henriette had been something of a religious nature all the time. What strange contrast in one soul! Two forces constantly at war.

Or were they merely the faces of the same impulse, a mortal cowardice, hence this last-minute-fear of the hereafter?

She stroked Henriette's head. "You have not hurt me," she said. "I am glad you told me. To know makes the spirit richer."

Henriette grew calmer. They chatted for quite a while.

"I read this again and again," said Henriette, showing Esperanza a life of Sor Juana Inés de la Cruz, the famous Mexican poetess who became a nun and gave up everything, finally her own life, to nurse the poor during the plague.

"I, too, have been inspired by Sor Juana," said Esperanza.

"But you have always been good," said Henriette.

"Who knows?"

Henriette told her she wanted to be her friend.

"Then be nice to poor Elena."

But the next day Elena was taken from the hospital to the penitentiary.

Was she, too, in danger of being sent to the Islands without trial?

The next two weeks, Esperanza made daily visits to the penitentiary to see Elena and David.

This was a breach of the rules, but the official in charge, a youngish, efficient man, very decently told her he was giving her special privileges because both prisoners would be sent off to the Islands.

Without telling David, Esperanza hurried around to see everybody she could who might have influence in getting him released.

She could not bring herself to ask any favor of Rufo—that struck her as too humiliating, but she did get an interview with the Secretary of the Interior. He was curt.

Except for a daring story by Tirso Bardo, she got no aid. She hit against a stone wall everywhere.

One day the prison director told her confidentially that the two prisoners would be sent to the Islands the following day. He made her promise she would tell neither the prisoners nor any one else on the outside.

"It will give you a chance to bring them things they can use there. They can be left here in the office."

She stuffed her handkerchief into her mouth and turned and ran out of his office.

David told her, when she saw him a few minutes later: "You seem unusually sad today. You take it all harder than I do."

"It all seems so unnecessary, so unjust, your being here."

She told him all that she had done for him.

He pressed her hand. "More coals of fire on my head," he said in a choked voice. "You are noble. But don't be upset," he pleaded.

She wanted to ask him to kiss her good-bye, but as she could not really explain why, she went away, tears in her eyes, her heart heavy.

All the rest of the day she tried frantically to get some action. All doors seemed closed.

As a last resort, she tried to get the Federation to stage a demonstration.

Estevan García, still cock of the walk there, now a communist, told her David had been a traitor to the cause. "He's a social Fascist," he declaimed.

She went away, raging at his narrow bigotry.

At last, steeling herself to the ordeal, she humbled herself to go see Rufo. If he could be moved, he could do anything.

He had luxurious offices in a publicity department he was managing for the official party. Only after much argument could she even get her name sent in.

After more than an hour's wait, she was admitted.

He was sitting behind an enormous mahogany desk—a mountain of fat flesh. His head with its big jowls and chin so rolled in fat, made him seem to have no neck at all. Almost bald now, his hair was plastered sleek on his big, shiny skull. His hands were gross and heavy and glistening with diamonds like those of a prima donna. He was smooth, oily and icy and exuded perfume.

The old, hard-hitting gorilla Rufo was gone.

But when she talked to him she soon realized that it was still there, still hard and ten times as cunning, beneath those layers and layers and layers of fat.

His porcine face was a cold expressionless mask; the pudgy heavy lids veiled lard-like eyes that now seemed to have no particular color. He greeted her in a dead monotonous tone that had an implacable relentless surety.

She reminded him of José.

He expressed a formal appreciation of José.

She told him the purpose of her visit, to get David released.

"I'm sorry, but I have no position in the government. I am merely connected with the party. The Secretary of Interior

handles such things. My fixed policy is never to interfere with official routine in any shape or form."

She insisted he must have influence.

He repeated the same identical words in the same cold monotone.

She tried to appeal to his vanity as a prominent and powerful man.

He merely repeated the same identical monotone words.

She tried to anger him.

He merely sat there, pudgy hands motionless on his desk, his pudgy lids drooping over his eyes, and repeated exactly the same words.

Passionately she accused him of being the evil genius of all their lives, of hers, of Luis', of José's, and now of David's. Her words were bitter and sharp-edged.

He repeated the same phrases without variation and rang for his secretary.

If she had had a gun Esperanza would have killed him on the spot.

She started to leave.

"Thank you for your visit," he said, in meaningless monotone. "I should like to help José's sister, but José, of course, refused to follow my instructions and got mixed up in the revolt and thereby jeopardized my position. Still I hold no grudge."

Esperanza's lips tightened with anger. She wanted to scream at him that he was a contemptible liar, that he had urged José and his other followers to risk their lives while he had saved his own filthy hide.

But why beat against a stone wall? This man had murdered; he had stopped at nothing to gain power and wealth. He was beyond emotion, beyond anything except his own cold purposes. How did men get that way?

She had failed.

There was nothing else to do. Only a miracle would save David.

LXXIV

The following morning, with Tirso Bardo, who was going to write up the scene, she went down early to the penitentiary. A large crowd was already gathered along the railroad tracks which ran along the street fronting the building. A long freight train was already made up and waiting.

A few in the crowd were just curious persons, but most were relatives or friends of prisoners—a rag-tail mob from the poor and desperate Peravillo and Colonia de la Bolsa slums.

Poverty and inequality, directly or indirectly, are the source of most crime, but society prefers to use iron bars and guns and retaliatory murder rather than economic justice.

At last the prisoners were brought out under heavy guard. Mounted soldiers were lined up and down the track, holding back the crowd.

Esperanza, standing tip-toe, saw Elena and waved to her, managing to attract her attention.

She looked anxiously for David, finally saw him. But so jammed in the crowd was she now, it was sometime before she could attract his attention.

He waved his hat gallantly.

Her throat tightened. Her eyes blurred.

The prisoners were shoved into various box cars. One who got in first began playing his guitar with a festive air, though the tune and words were sad. His voice was wavering, high-pitched, dissonant.

This twenty-ninth of August
They sent us in a gang to the Islands,
The Islands of the Three Marías to toil;
The sun is bright, but the day is sad.
Always our hearts will remember
The day we lost our liberty;
We left our wives; we left our kids;
Our sweethearts may never see us more.

Adios, penitentiary,
And all your gray galleries;
They are taking us to Manzanillo;
They will send us to the Three Marías.

Adios.

The crowd became restive. Jeers were directed at the mounted soldiers.

They sat impassively on their big horses.

People began throwing vegetables at them.

Still the soldiers sat impassive.

Suddenly rocks whizzed out of the crowd.

The soldiers, at an order, whirled and charged.

Esperanza managed to get to a doorway.

A large, fat woman went down under the heels of the mob. A horse passed over her.

Esperanza turned her face away.

When she looked again, the woman was lying there in an open space, bleeding.

The rest of the prisoners were brought out under heavy guard. Again, frantically Esperanza tried to see David, also Elena.

But the prisoners, now all in the box cars, had to keep back from the doors where stood armed guards.

She did not see Elena at all, then caught just a glimpse of David.

Faster and faster went the cars, swarming with soldiers on the roofs.

David was only a blur of color now.

All the figures merged into one streak.

The train whistled around a curve.

He was gone.

LXXV

Esperanza went back to her apartment. It was a tomb. Mexico City was a tomb.

She packed up Elena's belongings and sent them out to San Angel for Marta and Toño to keep for her should she ever return.

Again the days and weeks dragged up. Esperanza felt uncertain about everything, and when her month was up in the apartment, she moved into a room where she could live more cheaply.

The new President, Lázaro Cárdenas, was inaugurated. People said that he would clean things up and kick out the bandit politicians.

Esperanza doubted it, because this would mean stepping on all of Ex-President Calles' friends, still the boss of the country.

A long-delayed letter from David. He had reached the Islands safely—not such a bad place—nominal work—only very evil prisoners had a hard time—entertainment—even could meet women prisoners in social gatherings. Men who had wives or women with husbands could send for them and be allotted a small house where they lived independently.

Esperanza was surprised. She had imagined it as a sort of Devil's Island where men were slowly put through a living death. And was this a hint for her?

The letter fluttered from her hands. She sat staring in front of

her for a long time, remembering—remembering—so many things —

If he really wanted her she would go.

He wrote only briefly of politics, apparently had little hope that President Cárdenas would change things. "He's part of the old gang and his utterances are just pose—Portes Gil—who smashed down on every independent organization—is now head of the official government party—Rufo and Cedillo and others of their ilk are on top of the heap —

"Remember what happened to Caraveo—You can't expect much change with that set-up." A note of bitterness throughout—perhaps justified.

But to Esperanza the situation seemed more hopeful. There were some good straws in the wind.

Cárdenas abruptly closed up the scandalous gambling clubs and began dismissing prominent officials grown wealthy stealing from the public treasury. He increased the budget for education and apparently intended to go ahead with the agrarian program.

He lifted the ban on the Federation and other labor and peasant organizations.

Too, a definite break with Dictator Calles was in the offing, and if the latter's heavy and now unimaginative hand, however excellent his guidance might once have been, was taken off the throat of the country, without at the same time precipitating armed disturbances, that would mean a lot.

In due time, David, it seemed, would get out. Esperanza went to see the President's new secretary and got promises.

She wrote David. He thanked her effusively, but otherwise his letter seemed dis-spirited and standoffish.

Probably he would never come back to her. That side of her life was ended.

She got a letter from José. He seemed very pleased at the new turn Mexican politics were taking, though he was now doing so well where he was he had no intention of returning.

The best news of all came through from Ignacio, who wrote for Guadalupe, about to have her fifth baby besides Tadeo. Ignacio told Esperanza she ought to pay a visit about that time and also come up to the big fiesta. For the village under the Cárdenas administration had gotten prompt action on their lands. They were to be in permanent possession again in two months. They would have the grandest celebration ever.

Ten days later, Esperanza got another letter from him. The lands were really being returned. They were going to reopen the school right away. Marciano didn't want to come back; so, would Esperanza come up and be teacher?

Her heart bounded. She would like to go.

But to stay there permanently? Would she be happy?

After all, her life had changed so. If the city might mean little to her now spiritually or emotionally or any other way, habit chained her here, the accustomedness of things.

Could she stand the dark nights of Milpa Verde? The cold primitiveness of the place? The simple folk? The lack of intellectual horizons?

And yet what could she do staying on here in the city? Fill a government job that might not last?

What she needed was to find worthwhile interests in life somewhere, anywhere. Chávez had told her that, too.

A light came to her. The secret of the new Mexico really lay out in the villages. A real chance for service. There she could be a leader. She would not be lost as here, where she was merely a small peg in the wrong hole. She could do for the village children growing up that which she had been denied as a child, that only chance and hard knocks had given her, a mind free of superstitions and fear. She could make her people capable of defending their health, their homes, their rights. She could make the school, not merely a school, but a center of recreating Milpa Verde itself into a place with a new spirit and a new purpose. This, surely, was important.

But to go was thus really made a momentous decision. She had to choose, she felt, what was to be the course of the rest of her life. She could not go and then shuttle back. She had to make her work a cause, a sort of call, if not of the Lord in the conventional sense, of an ideal, an ideal of a better village, a better country, a better world, where men were freed of superstitious ignorance, of economic enslavement. She thought all of this over and the more she thought about it, the more uplifted she became.

That afternoon, walking down Madero street, she ran into Bobo. His face lit up.

"Where are you going, Bobo?"

"We should go back to the stones."

"Both of us?"

He nodded with a lugubrious smile. "The stones without their

maguey—go on with you. The fire without their pot—go on with you.”

She laughed to herself. She could understand why Toño felt so superstitious about Bobo. What he said seemed almost a command.

“Will you go with me, Bobo?”

He almost danced. “And can I play in the band there, too!” He made the motions of sliding a trombone.

“Of course you can.”

Suddenly his eyes filled. “I don’t like it here at all.”

And so it was decided. Esperanza had five hundred pesos saved up. She wrote Ignacio that she would take the school and that, if it were still possible, he was to take an option on the little house above the church.

Rapidly she made plans. It really would be nice to have her own home in Milpa Verde, to feel new life pulsing, a generation growing up.

The church no longer had a priest. It was kept by the villagers. And so the school gardens would not be torn up.

She would take her loom, perhaps even weave again and get back the feel of simple labor once more. Guadalupe would peddle the things for her in Amecameca. She would have her plot of ground, and Pablo and Ignacio would help her cultivate. And she had a few books, she had learned to love and read over and over again.

But it was not to be quite so simple as that. The very day she wrote Ignacio, a new rational educational law was put in force, which definitely precluded religious instruction in the public schools.

The ecclesiastical authorities infuriated by it—though Esperanza could not see why—promptly stirred up a big protest parade in Mexico City. Disorders occurred. The women marchers carried quick-lime which they threw into the eyes of the police to blind them.

Almost at once, armed raids, stirred up by the Church, were resumed by the Cristeros. They attacked the villages and began murdering rural school teachers.

Esperanza shuddered as she recalled the horrors of the Guadalajara train attack.

One morning she opened the paper to read how a band had swept into a Jalisco village and had cut off the ears of two school teachers—in the name of the Lord, she supposed.

Why were the Cristero elements so determined to maintain the old ignorance and superstition of the people?

But instead of being alarmed by these atrocities and dangers, they served to make her determination unbreakable. She welcomed the element of danger. To teach suddenly became a real crusade.

When she told Marta and Toño of her plans, they were horrified.

"You'll be killed," warned Toño. "You should have some protection in the village if you are going to teach."

But they could not swerve her. The danger merely made what she was doing seem more worthwhile. This, she felt, was at last a proper dedication of her life. She was doing what Luis would be proud to have her do. She was doing what David and José would be proud to have her do.

She saw it all now. The armed revolution had swung through its cycle. They had gotten free of the old hacienda chains, but some day they would be enslaved again unless people were properly taught to defend their rights and had the weapons of knowledge to do so.

Luis had lost his life; David was in prison; her brother José had lost an eye in that struggle. She would carry on bravely.

And so, two weeks later, she and Bobo went down to the train, the old, dingy San Lázaro station where so many years ago she had first come to the city.

Marta and Toño and Julia and Chávez, Matilda, Tirso Bardo, all her good old friends, came with presents to see her off.

"I'm coming up to measure some more skulls," cried Chávez.

"We'll all come up," they cried.

Julia hugged her and wept.

They acted as though she were going on a long, long journey forever, from which she might never return. They realized, of course, that this was a definite change in her life, that she really was leaving Mexico City for good.

The train rattled out of the yards. She looked out of the window, her hand in Bobo's, her eyes full of tears, at the fast-vanishing city.

Amecameca. Then the two hours' journey to Milpa Verde.

Home to Milpa Verde! Never had it seemed to mean quite so much, not even after Luis' death.

Toward the end of the ride, she spurred on rapidly.

In sight of the village, the golden dome of San Benito just visible over a little shoulder of hill, she stopped and took a long

breath of the pure upland air, redolent with the odor of pines and wild flowers. She gazed her full upon the lofty snow-clad volcanoes towering above them. The old prayer came back to her lips:

Oh God of the Smoking Mountain,
Spare us yet awhile . . .

About her lay the volcanic stones, and she remembered the old legend Luis had told her that night of her girlhood, before the day of disaster, how the stones were really sleeping gods that some day would awake. And now, they almost—almost seemed to stir.

She hurried on. About a quarter of a mile this side of the village she discerned a group of white-clad peasants.

Coming closely she saw it was the band and friends.

When she was in full view, they began playing—a lively tune. It was for her. She could hardly believe it.

There was Ignacio, and he hugged her and told her Guadalupe was getting on fine.

And of all things, Pablo and Petra and Toña—the poor old folks, so bent now and toil-worn, had trudged all this way out to meet her.

Their eyes were shining, full of tears.

Esperanza counted over all the village faces she knew so well, that she loved so well; so many were missing.

"Can I play in the band now?" asked Bobo.

"Of course he can, can't he, Ignacio?" asked Esperanza.

Bobo got his trombone out of the case slung behind on his horse and joined the band.

And thus, the band playing, gaily they walked on into Milpa Verde, on under a big floral arch across the lane in front of San Benito, on to the schoolhouse.

And at the head of the procession was the strange, stunted figure of the dwarf, the trombone to the thick lips of his big head, his cheeks puffed out mightily.

It was the fiesta of getting back the lands. It was the fiesta of the school. And the rockets were popping gaily in the sky with white puffs. And people were singing. People were happy.

Esperanza knew then that her decision to come back had been right.

THE END



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